

## May Queens.

BY REV. W. DALLOW, M.R.S.A.I.



WE make bold to say that nowhere is May-Day kept with such real zeal, earnestness, and splendour, as at the quaint old Cheshire town of Knutsford. Though, owing to the extreme changeableness of our climate, the first of May is by no means a taste of the poet's "Gentle Spring," yet, never daunted, the plucky people have kept up this rural fête, despite all kinds of weather, with a resolution to be jolly worthy of Mark Tapley. Indeed, our usual English May-Day is but too often a shivering time, but fitfully cheered by occasional gleams of the sun. Yet the "Queen" and all the happy youngsters, some hundreds in number, who compose her Court, shrink not from the procession to the scene of the coronation, but enter heartily into the spirit of the entire affair.

One year, the writer distinctly remembers how the slate-coloured sky threatened the pageant, and at three o'clock, as the Queen was crowned, a brief but terrific hail-storm burst over the ground.

At Knutsford, the people have a curious custom of "sanding" the flags before their doors with various interesting patterns, a custom said to belong to this place alone. It is done on occasions of weddings and other festivities, and, of course, at no time so carefully as on May-Day. On this—the great annual festival of the town—its streets are festooned and adorned with a profusion of flags; a triumphal arch of greens and

flowers spans the chief street, and as the hour approaches for the "Children's Fête," the merry chimes from the church-tower welcome the thousands of eager visitors. As Knutsford is in the heart of Cheshire, it is easily approached from Manchester, Liverpool, and Stockport, and special trains

and special vehicles of every possible description bring in a vast crowd before two o'clock, which is the hour the procession starts. Before describing the actual festivities which occur on the occasion, it may not be out of place to give our readers a brief account as to their origin in recent years.

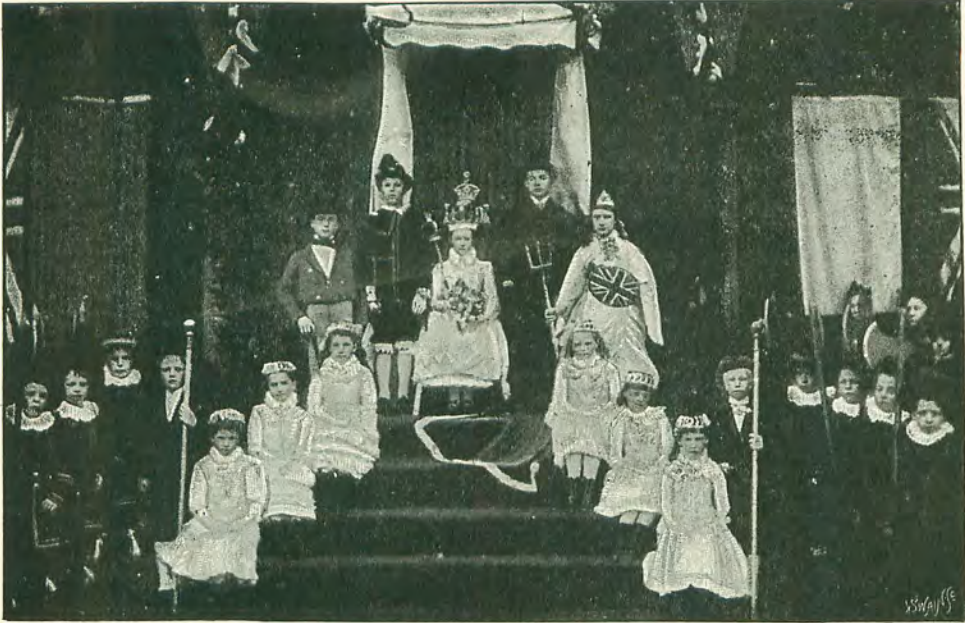
The May of 1864 was the first year which witnessed a revival of this ancient



MARY HICKSON, MAY-QUEEN, 1881.  
(From a Photo. by J. Hill, Birkenhead.)



LILIAN BEATRICE SANT, MAY-QUEEN, 1886.  
(From a Photo. by G. E. Bradshaw & Co., Altrincham.)



From a Photo. by]

MAY-DAY, 1887.

[Birtles, Northwich.

*The May-Queen and her Court waiting for the Visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales.*

English rural festival, and the crowning of a May-Queen. On that occasion, "Her Majesty" was carried to the Green, or the "Heath," as it is called, in a chair, and, as but few of her liegemen and vassals gathered around her, the affair had but a poor effect, compared with the splendour of the present festival. Moreover, at the period alluded to, the whole fête was merely got up for the Church of England schools, and matters continued thus until 1877, when a new committee of the most public-spirited Knutsfordians was formed, who took upon themselves all responsibilities, and were determined to proceed in so open-handed a manner as to win support on every side. They resolved, therefore, to know neither sect nor party, and invited all the children of the township, whatever happened to be their belief or religious persuasion. The results far surpassed their most sanguine expectations, and the May-Day festival of Knutsford now proceeds on such a tide of popularity as to render its safety secure for all future time. Though, of course, the expenses of such a



MARY HOWARTH, MAY-QUEEN, 1887.

(From a Photo. by G. B. Bradshaw & Co., Altrincham.)

fête are very great, yet a very handsome dividend remains from year to year, when all bills have been duly paid and the balance-sheet issued to the public.

The "May-Queen" for each year is chosen by ballot, by the ladies and gentlemen of the committee; and she is always selected from the "maids of honour" who have attended on the previous "May-Queens." We give here the portraits of several of the May-Queens of former years. Whilst writing this article, the *new* Queen for May, 1892, has just been chosen, Nellie

side walks at the entrance of the town, and by the efforts of a host of constabulary (imported for the occasion) the roads are all cleared and the processions come forth amidst the sounds of martial music of two fine bands, the ringing of bells, and the admiring plaudits of the multitude. Here is the order of the *cortège*, which goes slowly around the chief streets, and reaches the Green by three o'clock, the hour fixed for the Queen's coronation:—

The Marshal of the Procession, on a white horse.  
Battalion Band (3rd Cheshire), R.V.



MAY-DAY, 1889.

*The May-pole Dance by the Characters.*

Lee, daughter of Mr. Robert Lee, Knutsford, whose portrait will be found at the end of this article.

Whilst rude carts and quaint vehicles pour in at noon on May-Day, their loads of rustic visitors, special trains every half hour are discharging well-dressed thousands from the large towns near at hand, and of these children form the large proportion, since it is *par excellence* their special festival. Shortly after noon, the children begin to gather in the Town Hall, which is close to the railway station. As two o'clock approaches, the vast crowds are kept on the

The "Morris-dance," dancing as they proceed.  
"Jack-in-the-Green."

Standard-bearer.

All the Schoolgirls of Town.

Children of the Workhouse.

All the Schoolboys of Town.

The Representatives of various Trades, viz.: butcher, baker, clogger, sweep, saddler, joiner, gardener, constable, lawyer, &c., each with their proper emblem.

Carts adorned with leaves and flowers, containing the Infant School Children.

Knutsford Temperance Brass Band.

The two Royal "Court Fools," in State carriage drawn by two donkeys tandem.

The Royal "Blue-Jackets" of Queen's "Navee."

The Boy-Soldiers of the Royal Foot Guards, in red.  
Band of Flower Girls.

Party of Village Gleaners, with sickle and corn-sheaf.  
 Milkmaids, with stool and bucket.  
 Jack and Jill.  
 Dame Dorothy and Red Riding-hood.  
 Shepherd and Shepherdess, with pastoral crooks.  
 Bo-Peep and Boy-Blue.



ETHEL PEARSON, MAY-QUEEN, 1889.  
 (From a Photo. by Thorp, Knutsford.)

Cinderella and Witch.  
 A Gipsy King and Queen.  
 Italian Nobles (in fifteenth-century dress).  
 Italian Girls (modern Neapolitan dress, with tambourine).  
 Girls in representative characters of:—  
 Africa—with crown of feathers and assegai;  
 America—dress of "Stars and Stripes";  
 Australia; Canada (fur costume with skates on her arm);  
 India; Wales;  
 Scotland, and Ireland.

John Bull and Britannia (with her helmet, trident, and shield).  
 Two boys, as a Huntsman and a Jockey, both on horseback.  
 On a large lorrie, adorned with flowers and evergreen,  
 Four Girls suitably dressed as "Four Seasons."  
 Battalion Band of 4th King's (Liverpool Regt.).  
 A Band of Foresters, in green velvet and silver, with bows and arrows, headed by Robin Hood.  
 Two Heralds, in full dress, with trumpets.  
 The Royal Falconer, with a Hooded Hawk.  
 The Royal Swordbearer, bearing a drawn "Sword of State."  
 The Sceptre-bearer.

A boy in MacDuff Highland costume, bearing on cushion the Royal Crown.  
 The "Yeomen of the Guard," in dress of red velvet and gold, as Beef-eaters.

THE MAY-QUEEN,  
 in white and ermine, in her open carriage of State, drawn by four white horses, with postillion and two pages in red riding behind.  
 The six Maids of Honour, in white and purple velvet and ermine, in open carriage and pair.

This most beautiful *cortège* moves slowly around the town, the youthful "Queen-elect" bowing her thanks gracefully, in return for the many salutations and acclamations which greet on every side her progress to her throne on the Green. When all have arrived there, and the Queen has ascended the dais, and taken her seat, all are grouped around to witness the ceremony of the coronation. The crown-bearer slowly advances to the throne, kneeling at intervals three times on one knee. Then, taking the crown from its beautiful velvet cushion, he raises it aloft, and places it on the brow of the young maiden as the three bands burst forth into a musical salute, and the loud cheers of the surrounding crowd rend



HENRIETTA WINFIELD,  
 MAY-QUEEN, 1890.  
 (From a Photo. by De Vipan, Knutsford.)



HENRIETTA NEWTON, MAY-QUEEN 1891.  
 (From a Photo. by De Vipan, Knutsford.)

the air. The sceptre is similarly presented to Her Majesty, and then the programme of the afternoon is gone through. This consists of a Maypole dance, a morris-dance, manœuvres of footguards and sailors, drill by Robin Hood and his foresters, and



THE ROYAL MAY-DAY FESTIVAL, 1891.

last, but not least, a Scotch reel danced by the chief characters. This is a beautiful sight, as the little boys and girls in their brilliant costumes of every shade and hue flit about to the Highland music, and produce, as seen from the "Grand Stand," a wondrous and kaleidoscopic effect.

At five o'clock the "National Anthem" by the massed bands warns the company that the gay scene is coming to an end, and the too short reign of the "May-Queen" is nigh ended.

Between a double row of guards, sailors, maidens in every costume and colour, the May-Queen



NELLIE LEE, MAY QUEEN, 1892.  
(From a Photo. by Messrs. May & Co., Northwich.)

walks slowly off the field in solemn state, her six maids of honour upholding her train of red velvet and ermine, to her Royal tent, to take tea with her Court. Here, in a glorious helter-skelter, Queen and jester, soldier and sailor, &c. — these little happy folks, once more again in private life, though gorgeously caparisoned—munch their buns and currant-loaf, and drink deep draughts of tea, as they innocently toast their May-Day Fête! Then, with an orange and a new penny each, they slip home, one by one, after what was to them such a red-letter day!