

Welsh Queens of the May.

BY M. DINORBEN GRIFFITH.



HERE are not many picturesque and romantic customs left in this prosaic land, therefore we ought to appreciate the more the pretty custom of electing May Queens which still prevails in various country towns in England and Wales.

But perhaps at Llandudno, in North Wales, is the place where this charming function can be observed with the greatest wealth of picturesque detail. As one approaches the beautiful town on May Day, one cannot fail to notice that the peerless sea-front is adorned with Venetian masts, while innumerable pennons and flags wave their multi-coloured silks in the breeze, and enliven a picture which Nature has painted with skilled fingers.

May Day at Llandudno has no gloomy memories to sadden it. Each succeeding festival, it is said, eclipses the last; and every year a sweeter, daintier little maiden, clad in royal robes, is for one brief day *fêted*, cheered, and worshipped by enthusiastic thousands.

If faces are indicative of character, these little royal ladies have all the attributes that were necessary for candidates for the French *Rosière*—a general all-round goodness, in addition to their own personal charms of youth, beauty, and dainty robing. The make-believe of these children is delightful; the train and crown transform a merry little mad-cap into a stately little queen, unsmiling and staid, as if the cares of the kingdom were in reality hers. She accepts the homage rendered her as though to the manner born.

It was in 1892 that the May Day Carnival was inaugurated in Llandudno, and so great was the success of that charming festival that it has been repeated every year since that date.

On this page will be found reproduced the portrait of Miss Gwladys Jones, who was the first of Llandudno's May Queens. There was a most gorgeous procession, followed by the crowning of the Queen and the children's maypole dance. Crowds of sightseers poured into the town during the morning, taking advantage of the special railway facilities granted. The whole town was *en fêted*, and practically every tradesman contributed towards

the success of the procession. There were marshals on horseback, and the Conway brass band; the London and North-Western Railway Company's horses and carts; coaches, carrying the local football and cricket club; scores of private carriages, omnibuses, and brakes; the local fire-brigade, too, and the lifeboat; displays by grocers and bakers and butchers. There were decorated cart-horses, and donkeys with grotesque riders. And, fortunately for Llandudno, there happened to be at that time in the town a certain Professor Dainez, a show gentleman, whose circus ponies and goats added great dignity to the procession. No wonder, then, that the procession took rather more than half an hour to pass a given point. Needless to remark, the tradesmen were very much in evidence, but whether they were more interested in advertising their own wares than their appreciation of May Day, is not for me to say. One enterprising trader had what the local news-



MISS GWLADYS JONES (QUEEN IN 1892).
From a Photo. by W. Symmonds, Llandudno.

paper called a "unique exhibit," consisting of heaps of Welsh shawls, in front of which was a young person, attired as "blind Justice," holding the scales and declaring the superiority of the Welsh manufacture. Between three and five in the afternoon, the coronation and maypole dance took place in the Pier Pavilion. The big building was packed with an interested and excited crowd of spectators. The Queen herself was tastefully attired in white silk, embroidered with gold and trimmed with the choicest flowers. Her Majesty's train was two and a half yards long, and was borne by two little powdered pages, dressed in black velvet relieved by lace ruffles. There were four little maids of honour, dressed all in white, and wearing sashes of beautiful flowers. The moment the Queen had ascended the throne, she turned to the maids, who at once bowed low, and then the Queen seated herself with august and smiling mien. A ceremony of crowning was then gracefully performed by Master Maurice Mostyn, and then the Queen was presented with a splendid bouquet by Lady Augusta Mostyn.

Our next photograph is a portrait of Miss Effie Cooper, who was Llandudno's May Queen in 1893. "Of one thing," wrote the reporter of that excellent paper, *The Llandudno Advertiser*, to whom we are greatly indebted for our details, "we are now assured—that May Day and its attendant festivities has been firmly established as an annual carnival in Llandudno." The procession started from the usual rendezvous in Glod-daeth Street soon after two o'clock. The unfavourable weather, unfortunately, prevented a large number of exhibitors from sending round contributions to the procession, there-

fore the committee very properly decided to dispense with prizes in the various classes, and to award, in lieu thereof, a certificate of merit to all those who had contributed towards the success of the procession. We read that the Saint Tudno brass band was there, playing a lively air. The commissioners' contribution was very excellent in itself, but its connection with the *fête* was not obvious. To quote from the local newspaper again, it "comprised a load of coke, a water-cart, and a street-sweeper."

There were prize horses and ponies in the procession; also three very fat boys on a cart, who were "fed on J. B. Edwards's bread." Truly it was a great day. One of the most imposing exhibits in the May Day procession was that contributed by Mr. James Haworth, the ironmonger, who sent along a special wire mattress, a mangle, a garden-roller, and other unlovely things. He could have sent along a lot more things, only he was afraid the rain would spoil them. "The drizzling rain," wrote the local man, "greatly marred the glory of the procession," but it intensified the success of the gala in the Pavilion, where was presented a unique spectacle of lovely and idyllic beauty, witnessed by thousands of sight-



From a] MISS EFFIE COOPER (1893). [Photograph.

seers. Seated on the platform were about 120 boys and girls in pretty costumes, forming the court of the May Queen. The Queen's maidens wore Kate Greenaway dresses of ethereal blue. Miss Cooper bore her regal honours with sweet grace, being dressed in white broché silk trimmed with Brussels lace, her long white satin train being carried by two pages. The crown was of silver, decked with choice artificial flowers. Little Lady Viola Talbot presented the Queen with a handsome banner, after the orchestra had played the



MISS LAURA HAWORTH (1894).
From a Photo. by Slater, Llandudno.

grand "Coronation March." Then followed some pretty rustic dances, and, finally, Her Majesty was presented with five shillings. In the evening, some of the processionists—240 in number—were entertained to a capital dinner by the May Day Committee.

Next comes Miss Laura Haworth, the May Queen of 1894. The day was observed as a complete holiday, coming, as it did, before the heavy work of the summer season commenced. There was the usual crowd in the Pavilion to witness the coronation and to gaze on the Queen, with her gathering of attendants, courtiers, and dancers. The plaining of the ribbons of the maypole, a stately gavotte, and the graceful fan dance received the applause they deserved, while Queen Laura sat gracefully in state and smilingly surveyed the gay revelling. Various exhibits numbered 125. They were controlled by marshals on horseback, who were all dressed in costume—a field-marshal, a brigand chief, a bushranger, and so on.

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After the coronation, the Queen held a reception of her subjects, who were dressed in costumes representing every nationality over which Her Britannic Majesty holds sway. The May Queen's dress on this occasion is described as "A white Empire robe with lace and jewelled trimmings, and a white satin train 4yds. long." The train was lined with pink silk and trimmed with pink genista, roses, and maidenhair fern. Her Majesty had a most dignified appearance, and she constantly bowed

her acknowledgments to her people and her courtiers. It is interesting to note that the receipts in the Pavilion on the occasion of this coronation exceeded sixty-seven pounds. In the evening, there was a grand masquerade and fancy-dress ball, as to which you have only to learn that Mr. T. Bibbey appeared as Sir Walter Raleigh to get an adequate idea of its imposing magnificence.

It is no wonder that the



From a]

MISS HELEN HUGHES (1895).

[Photograph.

May Day festivities in Llandudno continued to be maintained. Miss Helen Hughes's photo. is next reproduced, she having been the May Queen of 1895. Over the whole committees on this occasion towered the form of Mr. John Jones, J.P., whose astounding energy and ubiquity were constantly remarked upon. He was backed up by local men of note, including Messrs. Bibbey, Broome, Littler, Wyley, and Pedler. An important item in the procession was contributed by the Llandudno Brick Company, who sent along a wagon-load of bricks. In the afternoon, the Queen, preceded by heralds and followed by the crown-bearer, entered the Pavilion. She wore a dress of ivory silk, trimmed with lace, and there was a train lined with pink satin and trimmed with a ruche of tulle. Her Majesty carried a crown shower bouquet, and wore on dress and train sprays of lilies of the valley, roses, pink may, and other lovely flowers presented by the ladies of the May Day Committee. Soon Queen and court retired to a veritable bower of flowers and ivy, and here Her Majesty remained to receive her subjects and witness the dancing.

But we must pass on to the next year (1896), when Miss Gwladys Wood was Queen. The same able persons were again on the spot, full of energy and ingenuity. The procession was a specially brilliant one. Of course, there was the inevitable Saint Tudno brass band and a host of butchers' carts, but there were also a great number of emblematical figures, such as an Australian bushman on a bicycle, and a troupe of old and new niggers—whatever they may be. Miss Symonds, of

Deganway, contributed an old horse, aged thirty-six; close behind, appropriately enough, was a detachment of the Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes. Mr. Percy J. Hutt contributed a coffee-roasting machine, and Mr. Roger Jones a severely plain milk-cart. All these things, of course, were not precisely topical; but they served to impress spectators, and, after all, that is the principal thing. Next, of course, came the usual festivities in the Pavilion, ushering in the charming May Queen, who was clad in white silk and pink may. Her

two pages wore white and gold satin coats and knee-breeches. The stage was beautifully decorated with a profusion of flowers, and there were two crowns kindly contributed by Mr. Peterkin. One of

these was suspended over the Queen's head, whilst the other was placed upon her regal brow. Then came the revels, appropriately inaugurated by the maypole dance.

The weaving of the be-rib-boned pole having been gaily and skilfully accomplished, four breezy little lasses in nautical caps ran on to the stage

and danced a rattling hornpipe. Finally, the May Queen was photographed, and presented with a new half-crown.

The May Day *fête* of last year was to be a record one. The weather was glorious, and the town gaily decorated. Train after train poured living freights into Llandudno, and the front was crowded with a merry throng, waiting for the procession. The queens, it should be said, are all children of good position. The May Day Committee of ladies work indefatigably for weeks, arranging and selecting the dresses, and coaching the children. The Pier Pavilion was again the



From a Photo. by

MISS GWLADYS WOOD (1896).

[Later, Llandudno.]

scene of the coronation. After the marshals, heralds, and courtiers came the crown-bearer. Last of all came the Queen herself, Miss Georgie Mather. The beauty of the little maiden was enhanced by her rich robes of thick white satin. Everyone was charmed with the modest grace of the little May Queen. Her Majesty's train was held by two diminutive baby boys, also in white satin, their eyes wide open with wonder. There were eight maids of



MISS GEORGIE MATHER (1897).
From a Photo. by Slater, Llandudno.

honour, gorgeously attired. The stage, as usual, was a perfect bower of exquisite, fragrant flowers. Our next photograph shows the Queen, surrounded by the whole of her court. This May Day had really three queens, for in addition to the newly-crowned monarch there was Queen Victoria of 1837 and Queen Victoria of 1897, who was attended by a Highlander. The coronation was performed by the Scotch laddie, who afterwards kissed the Queen's hand.



From a Photo. by]

THE QUEEN SURROUNDED BY HER COURT.

[W. Symonds, Llandudno.



THE TWO OTHER QUEENS OF 1897 (AND 1837), WITH THE ARCHBISHOP, PAGE, JESTER, ETC.
From a Photo. by W. Symmonds, Llandudno.

He was assisted in the ceremony by a most lovable and accurate archbishop, clad in stately robes, and with a most imposing mitre.

Our next photograph shows this group. Lying at the feet of the 1837-1897 queens is the court jester. The children were really very well drilled. The twenty-four dancers who went through the maypole dance held brightly-coloured ribbons in their hands, as they daintily trod their



MISS KATIE HOOSON, ELECTED MAY QUEEN FOR 1898.
From a Photo. by Manders, Llandudno.

mazy steps. Now and again there were unforeseen incidents. For example, on this occasion the crown-bearer dropped the crown off the cushion, and it rolled over to the Queen's feet. The unfortunate official was very much confused, but the Queen reassured him with a gentle smile.

Lastly, we give the portrait of Miss Katie Hooson, who has been elected the May Queen for the present year.