

Celebrities in Shells.

BY A. B. MAGUIRE.



ILKS and satins, ribbons and rags, clothed our dollies in the long ago days; even bits of tinsel and bright-coloured papers were made to play important parts in the hands of juvenile dressmakers, and I have a very vivid recollection of a certain dilapidated wooden doll whose comical covering of moss and feathers was fondly believed to be a most realistic reproduction of Robinson Crusoe's famous winter garments; but these makeshifts and economical inventions fade into insignificance before the ingenious and entirely original method which Mrs. Tatlow, a charming and clever Irishwoman, has employed in dressing a number of Dutch dolls in the quaint, characteristic costumes representing the different centuries of dress and fashion in England. To the ordinary beholder these dolls are simply a wonderful sight, whilst the initiated find delight in the accurate details of their toilettes, the clever choice of material, as well as in their unique construction.

I first made the acquaintance of these curious figures at a *conversazione* in the Royal University of Ireland, where they aroused more enthusiasm and interest than all the scientific marvels exhibited that evening, and certainly presented a most unexpected sight in the halls of learning. Beneath the dazzling glare of the electric light, arranged on a table, was a large group of mimic kings and queens, knights

and courtiers, whose suits of armour, trunk hose and doublets, flowing trains and elaborate bodices were composed solely and entirely of shells! It may seem almost incredible, but shells, and shells only, were used to accomplish this wonderful result, which, however, must not for one moment be confounded with the shell-work boxes and other atrocities so familiar to visitors at seaside resorts. In this case great artistic taste and conchological knowledge guided the clever fingers, and made Mrs. Tatlow's difficult task a marvellous success.

The crowd at the *conversazione* rendered a close and critical inspection of the dolls impossible, more especially as a ballot was going on to decide which was the most admired costume, an honour accorded to Elizabeth Woodville, Queen of Edward IV., by a very large majority of votes. The kind suggestion made by Mrs. Tatlow of a "private view" at her own house was very gratifying, and a few days later found me *en route* for Delbrook armed with note-book and camera to interview "The Royal

Family," as they are invariably dubbed by their owner's intimates. There set out in great array for the purpose of being photographed were the dolls, which on nearer acquaintance proved even more wonderful than I had anticipated.

Apart from their unique garments, there was a quaintness about them that was quite amusing; the stiff figures and comical expressions of the Dutch dolls seemed more particu-



MRS. TATLOW, WHO MADE THESE CELEBRITIES IN SHELLS.
From a Photograph.

larly suited to display the various types and periods of costume than any modern wax effigies or china models could do, and the extraordinary fidelity with which the different details were copied proved Mrs. Tatlow's possession of "that infinite capacity for taking pains" which is akin to genius.

Being an enthusiastic collector of shells all her life, she brought to her work an immense conchological knowledge, which proved of the greatest assistance. It was, indeed, the pursuit of her favourite hobby that led indirectly to her

attempting the task. One year, while spending the summer months in Guernsey, she entered a little shop, and while in conversation with the owner expressed her surprise that so few shells were to be found on the shores of the island. The old woman assured her that the dearth was quite of recent date, and that when she was a girl beautiful shells had been found there in great profusion.

She then invited her customer into her little sitting-room to show her some choice specimens of "ocean's spoils," and there under a glass shade was displayed a doll clad in garments completely incrustated in shells. The old lady declared that it was over one hundred years old, and guarded it almost reverentially, and it required no little diplomacy on Mrs. Tatlow's part to be afforded an opportunity of examining it and ascertaining the method used for attaching the shells. Once given the clue she determined to go



MATHILDA OF FLANDERS—1066.



KING ARTHUR.

and do likewise, and by the time she returned to England she had planned out the whole scheme for her historic dolls. Then the real preparation began, records of ancient dress had to be looked up, pictures, coins, effigies on old tombs in Westminster Abbey studied, and dolls of a suitable style selected.

The dressmaking stock-in-trade consisted only of a large supply of shells, some Brussels net, and a glue-pot; and the work, which, contrary to expectation, presented fewer difficulties than Mrs. Tatlow anticipated, pro-

ceeded rapidly. The skeleton garments, stiffened with glue, were moulded into their required form and folds before the shells were attached; designs and patterns were carried out in the larger-sized shells first, whilst the filling-in was completed with infinitesimally fine specimens. In many cases these tiny shells—really no bigger than grains of sand—were so skilfully manipulated, that they were made to simulate fabrics of a rough twilled surface, whilst others of beautiful and varied tintings were so disposed as to give the effect of rich embroidery and gorgeous jewellery.

Mathilda of Flanders, the first figure finished, proved a wonderful success, and certainly the Royal lady looked as if she had stepped straight out of the Bayeux tapestry from which, indeed, she was faithfully copied, the whole costume being carried out in delicately coloured shells (*Helix acuta*), collected about Dundrum Bay, Co. Down. Quaint as still was King Arthur



ELIZABETH WOODVILLE, QUEEN OF EDWARD IV.

of England, in full armour, with helmet and shield, as represented by the famous statue in Innsbruck Cathedral.

For elaboration of detail and beauty of colouring few of the costumes could compete with that worn by Elizabeth, consort of Edward IV. The draped skirt was wonderfully arranged, and in its construction shells of the following varieties were used: *Rissoas*, *Cerithiums*, *Odostomias*, and *Trochus cinerareus*, the wide border being composed of choice specimens of *Nucula nucleus*; similar shells formed the bodice, the trimming of which was effectively carried out in *Axinus flexuosis*; the steeple head-dress was made of cowries, and the flowing veil of a great variety of tiny shells, found, like all the others used in this toilette, on the shore at Roundstone, Co. Galway, a haunt little known to conchologists, but which has always been one of Mrs. Tatlow's happy hunting-grounds.



EDWARD THE FIRST.

The Strand at Malahide, Co. Dublin, provided nearly all the specimens used for the dress and armour of Richard Cœur de Lion, a very successful figure; the cross of lovely rosy red



RICHARD CŒUR DE LION.

Phasianella pulla telling effectively against the coat of mail, which was entirely composed of *Nucula nucleus*; the cloak was of *Pecten apercularis* and *Rissoas*, and the helmet of *Hydrobia ulvæ*.

Edward I. was a martial-looking figure, clad in armour composed of *Littorina obtusata* and *Littorina litorea*, some beautiful specimens of *Nucula nucleus* being used for the belt.

A variety of shells was found in the coat of mail and helmet of Edward the Black Prince, whose attire was copied from an illustration in a very old French work on costumes. Queen Elizabeth's gorgeous garments were copied from the picture depicting her as she went to St. Paul's on November 24th, 1588, for the



QUEEN ELIZABETH. CAVALIER TIME OF CHARLES II. THE BLACK PRINCE.

thanksgiving service after the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Her robe, which was said to be incrustated with jewels, gave scope for a fine display of coloured shells and much ingenuity of arrangement, and her red hair was cleverly represented by a sea urchin. The shells used on the skirt, bodice, and stomacher were found on various parts of the coast of Alderney, and included a



QUEEN VICTORIA IN HER CORONATION ROBES.



QUEEN VICTORIA AT EIGHT YEARS OLD.

picked collection of *Scalaria communis*, *Eulima polita*, *Marginella lewis*, *Arca lactea*, *Dentalium entalis*, etc.

A cavalier of the time of Charles II. was dressed in garments made of *Nucula nucleus* and *Axinus flexuosis*, the characteristic hat of the period being contrived out of *Nucula nucleus*; but this gentleman was scarcely as successful as many of his companions, owing to some thread lace having been introduced into his costume, which had a most in-

congruous effect, that fortunately was not observable in any other specimens.

Mrs. Tatlow quite redeemed her artistic reputation in her various nine-



THE PRINCE CONSORT DRESSED AS EDWARD III.



HENRY VIII.

teenth-century models, which were extremely clever. These included several of Queen Victoria, one resplendent in her coronation robes, the embroideries, fur trimmings, and jewels being imitated with wonderful fidelity.

I was particularly delighted with an interesting copy of a picture of the Queen at the age of eight years. The poke-bonnet almost covered the face, and the short dress, low bodice, and puffed sleeves were childishly quaint, and must have taken considerable time in their construction, for though *Trochus* were the only shells used, they had been most carefully selected, and the different varieties included the following: *Tumidus cinereus*, *Montacuti*, *Zizyphinus*, *Millegranus*, *Exasperatus*, *Striatus*, etc. The dress was trimmed with *Phasianella pulla*, and the bonnet was made of *Arca lactea*, all the shells being

from Alderney. The late Prince Consort was well portrayed in the costume of Edward III., in which he appeared in the year 1842 at Her Majesty's famous Plantagenet ball at Buckingham Palace.

Gentlemen's dress in the early Victorian period was represented by a striking-looking figure, with a ponderous top-hat; this, together with the long coat and trousers, was of *Arca lactea*, of dazzling whiteness; the short-waisted vest was of *Phasianella pulla*, all the garments being edged with *Cypræa Europæa*. Harry the Eighth was easily distinguished by his portly dimensions and characteristic hat.

Mrs. Tatlow's next piece of work promises to be much more ambitious than the historical dolls, which are shortly to be placed in a public museum.



GENTLEMAN OF THE EARLY VICTORIAN PERIOD.