

London: A City of Roses

Alexandra Day Celebrated — Duchesses as "Flower Girls"—Ten Million Roses made by the Indigent Blind and Crippled.

NE strip of sun-washed pavement in the Edgware-road, London, early one morning in June, might have been compared with the Sacred Way from Athens to Eleusis.

Beautiful vestals streamed along it, clad in shining white, and rose-girl. They had never been there before, evidently, from the look of wonderment in their tender eyes and the hesitation in the clatter of their high heels. They were fresh and lovely, eager-eyed and adventurous: at least one Duchess moved among them with a basket on her arm—a Duchess as artless as a dairymaid!

The Phebeians stood on the edge of the pavement, wonderstruck at the Alexandrine vision, and wanted to know what it was all about.

Incident of a Duchess

"This," said the Duchess to the gentleman who sells first-class kippered herrings at the corner kiosk-stall in Church-st.—"this is Alexandra Day! Won't you buy a rose, sir? One for a penny: a bunch for a shilling!"

"Certainly, my dear!" replied the merchant. "Being as how it's you, I'll have a half's worth!" and from a bowl by the side of a pile of sun-kissed mackerel (long deceased) he counted out 12 scaly pennies into the white hand of the syren before him. Then with the far-famed generosity of Church-st. he offered the Duchess a peace offering in the shape of a blood orange. Who could refuse? Certainly not this Vision of Delight in her diaphanous shanting.

"You needn't eat it now, miss. You'll want it later on: flower sellin's thirsty business this weather. Put it in your pocket."

Marquis and Mackerel.

The Duchess made what the romantic novelists call a "moue." "Alas!" said

she. "I have no pocket." And so the incident ended. Afterwards, at a scratch lunch, hurriedly shared at a neighbouring A.R.C. with several other duchesses and coster-countesses, a marquis and an envoy plenipotentiary, the heroine of this scene recounted her adventure.

"Was it not rich?" said she.

"It might have been a mackerel," remarked the marquis as he sententiously quartered the blood-orange. "And then what would you have done?"

"I should have sold it for half a crown for the fund," replied the Duchess.

And all over London, with the fairest of our aristocracy swarming the streets and importuning everybody, this business instinct prevailed. Alexandra Day, which this tremendous carnival of chaffering represented, turned the whole town into one vast, bewildering bazaar. Ten million roses had been made by the indigent blind and the poor cripple to sell in remembrance of her Majesty's historic entry into London (and her simultaneous capture of our hearts) fifty years ago. And by sundown ten million were sold—all for sweet charity's sake.

Mayfair and Belgravia.

Every pretty woman in society, cheered by the fair weather, had come out into the whirl of streets laden with piles of artificial roses. The "romance" of the idea, the opportunity of showing off a charming frock and a fetching hat, had emptied all the drawing rooms and all the boudoirs of Mayfair and Belgravia.

Shall we ever see again Lady Eva coyly pinning a saucy rose in the rough "son-wester" of a bending dustman, or the wife of a multi-millionaire capturing the heart of a blushing boy-messenger and giving him change for a threepenny-bit, as we saw that day? Never!

Or shall we forget the perfect picture of Lady X—, wearing her second best diamonds and fixing with her hypnotic



Topical, photo.

TEMPTING THE SENTRY OF THE HORSE GUARDS.

eye the hurrying crowd near by the Mansion House Station? Ever since the day when her ancestor, Sir Bevis, sliced off heads at Stamford Bridge, the X—'s have refused to soil their hands with trade, and that is why my Lady brought her maid with her, loaded her with the pretty petals and the money-box, and stood by in the attitude of a superior shopwalker whilst the maid did all the business. That was, indeed, a sight for the gods.

Unless you wore a rose in your button-hole or in your hat you had no peace: you were simply pounced upon and pulverised into shelling-out. For once the City was in complete possession of this vivid, energetic army of fair besiegers.

Here the Lady Mayoress was arch-conspirator. Merchandise was actually hawked on the very steps of St. Paul's: charity conveniently covered the sin. The Lady Mayoress

wished it to be understood that the wild roses are not being sold, but are practically given as a receipt for any contribution that may be placed in the boxes of the ladies carrying the flowers!

Who could resist that?

The Ideal and the Real.

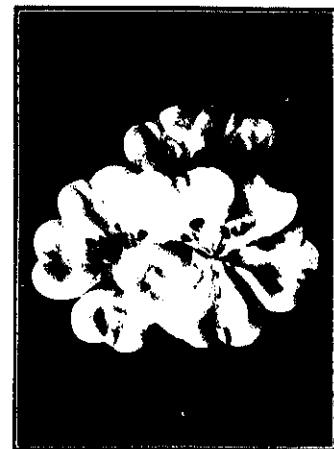
It was the day of sublime artificiality throughout. Enormous energy was expended: never was Greece more wily than these splendid dames, with their artless but artful capdery. Alexandra Day proved (perhaps to the mortification of the gilded pages of Dehretti) that we really are a superlative nation of shopkeepers, however much we may try to disguise the fact.

It proved, also, that these gifted amateurs, with all their exuberance and all their floral rhetoric, were unable to overwhelm the natural attractiveness of the rose-maidens who were selling the real thing around the bright statue of Hermes in Piccadilly-circus and outside Victoria Station.

Some one asked a real rose-girl at Victoria how she had fared in her selling. She said, with a bright smile, that she was doing excellently, in spite of the duchesses. Taxi-drivers, bus-drivers, and poorly-dressed men and women were her chief customers.

"Many of these," she added, "gave me sixpence for a penny rose, and would not take any change. And I am not jealous. I have bought a bunch of Alexandra roses, but they look very poor and pale beside my own blooms. The contrast has brought me custom!"

Queen Alexandra herself set the seal on the day's work during the afternoon, when, accompanied by Princess Victoria, she left Marlborough House to make a tour of some of the districts where roses were being sold. Her Majesty drove along the Mall and through Admiralty Arch, along the principal streets of the West End. Her Majesty motored to the East End in the evening.



"Weekly Graphic," photo.

ONE OF THE ROSES.

The buttonholes were largely artificial, made by the indigent blind and crippled. The rose from which this photo was taken was sent out to Mr. J. Crawford, secretary of the Orphans' Club, Auckland, by his mother, who lives in London.



Topical, photo.

SCENES AT WHITEHALL ON ALEXANDRA DAY.

Mrs. Dyke Speer, one of the numerous workers, selling flowers to Russian officers of the War Office.