

"A TRIP TO EUROPE"

Sixth article in the series by Miss Margaret Laundry.

"The Garden Party"

Early in the New Year we applied for tickets to the Royal Garden Party held for Commonwealth Members at Buckingham Palace, May 28th. Not until May 2nd. did we receive those big gold and black engraved invitations from the Lord Chamberlain. Then the question arose- what to wear? New dresses even for Buckingham Palace were not in our budget but our best afternoon dresses came out of the trunk and our hats perked up with a new veil and a new flower. The day was lovely although a little chilly - the first day for many years that it had not rained for at least a short while during the festivities. Big yellow stickers marked with a black X were sent with the invitations "to affix to the windsheild of your motor vehicle"; but not having motor vehicles we hailed a taxi and in unison, directed proudly, "to Buckingham Palace, please!" and deluged the driver with yellow stickers amid gails of laughter. Nearing the Palace we got into such a traffic jam that we felt rather than be late we'd throw pride to the wind and walk after all. And so on foot we announced ourselves to the Bobbie at the Gate surrounded by hundreds of curious onlookers. Chauffeur driven Rolls-Royces, lined up the full length of the Wall, passed us one by one as we walked on through the front courtyard to the inner quadrangle and into the large reception room of the Palace itself.

It was just what you'd expect of a Palace - wall to wall, thick piled, wine carpets, heavily quilted ceilings in relief, large oil paintings and marble busts of royalty, and in each corner of the room a large cabinet containing services of Chelsea China made for the Royal Family in the early 1700's. At the far side of the room were steps leading down in to the garden itself. 7,000 guests were reported to be there and I'm sure 7,000 more could have been comfortably accomodated which will give you some idea of the garden's immensity. Summery afternoon dresses and small hats seemed most popular with the women but there were a few flowery formals with picture hats. The men were all in morning garb - grey cut away tails, black and white striped trousers and grey top hats. Two bands lent a gay atmosphere with martial and popular tunes.

At exactly 4:30 they struck up "The Queen" and there she was coming down the  
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"A TRIP TO EUROPE" (cont.)

Palace steps with Philip, the Queen Mother and Margaret. The ushers made aisles thro the guests and the Party broke up into three groups. The Queen Mother followed by Margaret stood talking for ten minutes, no more than ten feet from us, while many were presented. The Mother wore a white lace dress with small white hat, while Margaret wore a pink tafetta with grey net overskirt and rose petal hat. Without exaggeration I can say that she had the bluest eyes of anyone I have ever seen. The Duke looked "smashing" in morning dress - but no hat for I hear he loathes them. He spoke to an Indian chap in uniform standing directly in front of me asking how he liked his barracks and if he were comfortable. Must admit that I spent so much time gazing at these three that I didn't get a close up view of the Queen herself before they all joined to have tea. However at a distance I could see she was wearing a pink appliqued dress with mink cape and close fitting pink hat.

Shortly after 5 while the Royal Party had their tea, we were served by waitresses in black, behind long white-clothed tables set up in the Marquee. There were small iced cakes, cart wheel chocolate rolls, finger buns with meat pastes, ice cream, fruit "squash", iced coffe and tea to mention but a few of the refreshments.

Almost as big an attraction as the Royal Family itself were a colourful Afridan group centering around the Ogie of Inge, a huge man dressed in a red and gold draped costume with gold ornaments stuck into his tight curly hair, bangle bracelets on wrists and ankles, and brown leather sandals as big as dinner plates. Shading him from the sun was a large red satin umbrella embroidered in gold and held by three black servants, as brightly dressed as he. A beautiful Indian girl, tiny of features and build also attracted our attention. She wore a lovely white satin sari embroidered with silver threads and seed pearls. But what really opened our eyes was the diamond in the right nostril of her nose! Even George Drew and his wife had been invited. Plump, Perle Mesta of "Call Me Madam" fame was there in a long flowered gown and huge picture hat topped with bunches of flowers and trailing feathers. If only we had been allowed our cameras!

At 5:30 the Royal Family left and slowly the guests dispersed. We lingered as long as possible, hating to see the end of a day we should never forget!