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Shoe Store.

The Season in LONDON

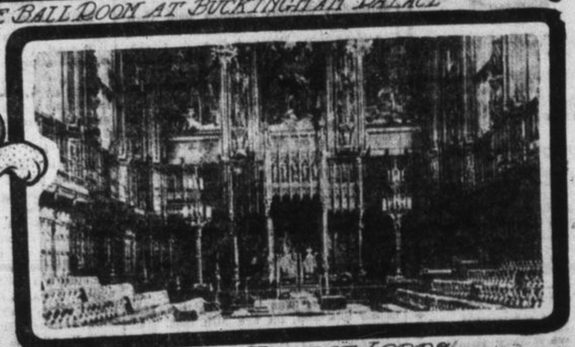
BY VICTOR DOUSEAU

BUCKINGHAM PALACE
WAITING FOR THE KING

ST. JAMES' PALACE

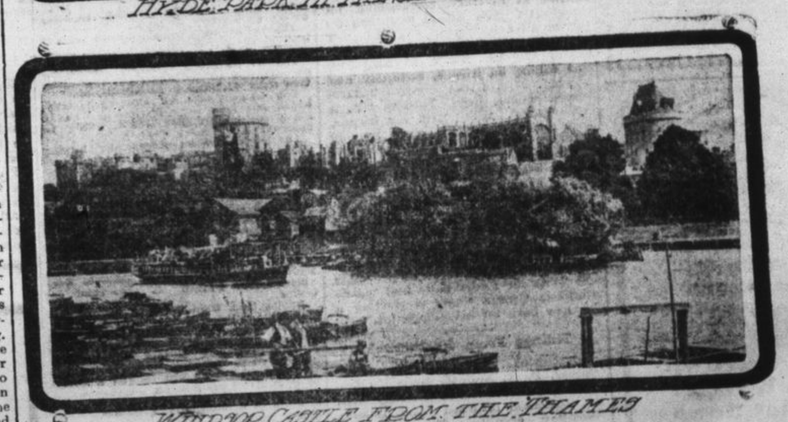
THE BALLROOM AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE

THE KING AND QUEEN
OPENING A BAZAAR



THRONE IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

HYDE PARK IN THE SEASON



WINDSOR CASTLE FROM THE THAMES

About the beginning of May the fogs and clouds which have hung over London during the winter vanish, and the unfamiliar sun is seen almost daily. A new life seems to stir—not in that grimy underworld where hunger and disease stalk, year in and out, twin specters of poverty, but along the fashionable quarters. Lilac, laburnum and rhododendron blossoms overhang the streets bordering upon the royal parks, which are themselves resplindent and odorous with multi-colored hyacinth, tulip and jonquil. Then all the elite flock to the metropolis. The season has opened.

Picture the change. A whole square mile of streets, empty since fall, save for the chance passing pedestrian, thousands of houses, all showing the same shuttered, curtainless windows, suddenly awaken and become replete with life and activity. Children are seen, accompanied by smartly dressed nurses or governess; automobiles (called motor cars), coaches and phaetons, with high-stepping horses and liveried attendants, form a long line on either side of the roadway. The big houses in Park Lane and Belgravia open their doors to parties, receptions and bridge gatherings; Bond, Oxford and Regent streets set out their choicest wares in anticipation of the American invasion; telegrams for rooms to the Savoy, Cecil, Victoria and all the fashionable hotels pour in by thousands from England and the continent. All that is wealthy, brilliant and smart dines nightly in public at Princes or at the Charlton. On Sundays a stream of humanity pours along the leafy avenues of Hyde park, especially near the Achilles statue, moving one year along the Park Lane side and another along the Piccadilly, as fashion dictates, about the hour of noon. This special function of the London season far outshines the Easter parade along Fifth avenue. The men are all dressed in grey or black frock coats and new high hats, and they move with true English awkwardness and self-conscious dignity, swinging their sticks and carrying the right glove in the left gloved hand, so as to have the shaking hand bare for greeting acquaintances. The women are visions of silks and laces.

Hyde park may be said to be the concentration point of all society during the season. In early morning the "liver brigade" trots or canters upon the tan laid down along the old Route du Roi or Royal road, corrupted into Rotten Row. The grand pedestrian parade follows during those hours preceding luncheon. From two to four automobiles spin along the well-kept roads; after which come the carriages. To drive in the park at least three times a week is a duty no self-respecting lady would omit to perform. Sometimes, in the height of the season, the stream of vehicles is so dense that it completely chokes the roads, moving at a snail's pace past the crowds of well-dressed idlers who lean over the bars to ogle strangers or recognize acquaintances. Each coachman wears a cokade; a symbol, not so long ago, of military rank, but now affected universally.

During the lifetime of the old queen, who passed her days secluded in one or other of her four castles, England has no "fountain of honor" to unite the scattered social groups into one harmonious whole and take his place naturally at the head of them. The queen, coming to the throne at a time when royalty had been made more or less contemptible by the follies and vices of the Georges and the antics of the fourth William; gradually succeeded in re-establishing the ancient ceremonies and restoring the prestige of the crown. She had old-fashioned ideas;—no princess, for example, was ever permitted under any circumstances to lunch in a public restaurant. The accession of the present king has inaugurated a new era. The monarch has assumed his place as leader of everything that is smart and fashionable, and the English court is the most brilliant and ceremonious in Europe.

The season originated in the coming to town of the gentlemen to attend at parliament, and parliament still regulates its duration, which lasts from soon after the opening of the session, in spring, until the prorogation about the 12th of August summons all fashionable London to the delights of grouse slaughter. Though parliament has ceased to be quite so much "the thing" since those "dreadful" labor members lowered the tone of it, it numbers sufficient landed gentlemen to enable it to retain its connection with smart society.

The opening of parliament is the first of the season's occurrences, though it is rather a prelude than an event of it. Soon after 1.30 in the afternoon, the state procession leaves Buckingham Palace, and passes by way of Processional Road, the Horse Guards, Whitehall and Parliament Street to the houses of parliament, the king and queen bringing up the rear in the famous state coach, drawn by eight Hanoverian cream colored ponies, and escorted by the Yeoman of the Guard and the Royal Horse Guards. Upon the king's arrival at the House of Lords a salute of forty-one guns is fired by the battery of the Royal Horse Artillery in St. James' Park. At the entrance to the Victoria Tower the king and queen are received by the great officers of state and conducted to the robing room. Prominent among the procession are the Bluemantle Pursuivant, the Rouge Croix Pursuivant, the Portcullis Pursuivant, the Rouge Dragon Pursuivant, the York, Windsor, Richmond and Somerset Heralds, the Gentleman Usher to the Robes, the Keeper of His Majesty's Privy Purse, the Lord High Privy Seal, the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, the Farter Principal King at Arms, the Gold Stick in Waiting and the Silver Stick in Waiting—all excessively amiable gentlemen of high dignity, who see nothing humorous or ridiculous in the parts they play in this masquerade, and would be excessively shocked could they believe that anyone else did.

After the king has assumed the royal robes of crimson silk velvet, edged with gold lace and lined with ermine, the procession continues on its way to the House of Lords. The Earl of Crewe carries the crown upon a tray, and the Earl of Winchester, by hereditary privilege, holds the cap of maintenance on a short stick. The king takes his seat upon the throne, surrounded by his principal officers, with the lord chancellor among the judges upon the woolsack, and the bishops in their red gowns and white copes, and the peeresses in their gallery, flashing with jewels. The gentleman usher of the Black Rod is sent to command the faithful commons to attend in the other house and listen to the royal speech. As Black Rod approaches the Commons, however—and this historic survival is the only touch of dignity and independence about the masquerade—he finds the door slammed in his face by the sergeant-at-arms. He then lifts up his rod and hammers three times upon the portals, which brings the sergeant-at-arms to the grating, and after he has ascertained who the and the speaker leads the commons to the House of Lords, where the king's speech is read.

The season has altered very much of recent years. In former times ladies came up to town only for the purpose of presenting their daughters at court and attending balls, with a view to match-making. But outdoor life and the introduction of athletic sports have changed all this, and the motor week-end in the country has lent a new feature to the fast disappearing formality of older days. Restaurant life, too, has largely supplanted home life. Still, certain traditional functions remain—for example, the great political dinners and balls, given by ladies of historic name, such as the Duchess of Devonshire, when their own party happens to be in power. And as the court always decides and leads, so the court ball, concert and dinner are three central epochs of the annual season.

The event which has most importance in the eyes of the debutante, and of many a fair visitor from this country is, of course, the presentation at court, without which no one can really be said to have credentials of respectability. And this ceremony does have a certain value, in that no woman whose past history is not stainless can hope to survive the previous investigations of the lord chamberlain. During the old queen's reign drawing-rooms were held in the afternoon, and ladies wishing to be presented were compelled to drive through the streets in daylight, wearing their court dresses, exposed to the remarks of the London crowd, which, for good-humored mockery and ruthless humor reigns supreme anywhere, Nowadays courts are held in the evening. Invitations are issued two or three weeks ahead to perhaps a thousand or more prospective debutantes, who reach Buckingham Palace about ten o'clock. The king and queen have come up from Windsor for the occasion and cheered by the thousands who gather outside the palace gates and peer into the carriages. The brilliant uniforms of the Honorable Corps of Gentlemen at Arms, the Yeomen of the Guard, and the Sticks and Staves lend color to the motonony of the scene outside the entrance.

When the royal members have arrived at the palace they are received by the White Staves and conducted to the council room. Thence they proceed to join the king and queen in the white drawing room, and here the procession is formed, and passes successively through the gold drawing room, and the state dining room to the ball room, where it halts and disperses. The king, wearing the uniform of a field marshal, escorts the queen through the brilliant assembly, acknowledging the homage and acclamations which he receives from all quarters. The queen wears her famous tiara of diamonds, and her train is carried by pages in little coats of scarlet. The royal pair place themselves upon a strip of carpet before their respective thrones in the ball room and await the presentations.

While all this has been proceeding within upon the staircase and landing outside the doors the poor debutantes are fighting and jostling one another in the efforts to reach their destination and avoid suffocation. Each of them is accompanied by her sponsor, who, in distinction from all the other ladies, must wear a train. The couple advance forward and hand the official card to the official in waiting at the door, who hands it in turn to the Lord Chamberlain beside the throne. The debutante hears her name read out; she advances alone on to the strip of carpet, courtesies, and retires, in nervous terror lest she forget the fruits of those weeks of careful instructions in the deportment school and blast her career for ever by committing the awful sacrilege of turning her back upon the throne instead of walking out backward.

After the presentations have been concluded the king and queen devote their attention to the others who have attended the court, walking back through the various state apartments and pausing for a moment to speak to favorites as they pass along.

Another court function, akin to the foregoing, but this time for men, is the royal levee, which is held at St. James' Palace, a quaint old structure now generally disused except for this occasion, standing at the bottom of St. James' street, leading out of Piccadilly. The king rides thither from Buckingham Palace in his state carriage, with its trappings of gold and scarlet, an escort of Life Guards accompanying him, seated upon magnificent horses, carrying drawn swords and wearing gleaming cuirasses. Arriving at St. James' Palace the king is received by the cabinet ministers and principal officers of state, and conducted to the throne room, while inside and outside a guard of honor is formed by the Gentlemen-at-Arms and the Yeomen of the Guard. In the throne room is drawn up the diplomatic circle, consisting of ambassadors from almost every country in the world, resplendent in glittering uniforms, in silken robes, in fez and caftan, with the exception of the American ambassador, who presents a dignified contrast in his plain suit of black. The first to be presented are distinguished foreigners from the continent of Europe, and then come Englishmen of repute or sudden celebrity, whom the king desires to become acquainted with. After this the ceremony of knighthood is conferred upon a number of unoffending country tradesmen and local mayors, whose appearance does not at all suggest chivalry or valorous actions. The knight is usually the small local magnate who is not considered worthy of a baronetcy, but for whom the title of "Sir" presents an indescribable glamor. This woman goes down upon one knee before his sovereign, who strikes him across the shoulder with the flat of his sword at the same time exclaiming "Arise, Sir Isaac Isaacs," or "Sir William Robinson," as the case happened to be.

Sport, of course, plays a prominent role among the events of season, and certain historic institutions are renewed annually, to be applauded with as much eagerness by the parents of the performers as by these themselves. Such, for example, is the annual cricket match between Harrow and Eton at Lords' Cricket Ground, when the dark or light blue favors are to be seen on every spectator, and rapturous applause follows a successful stroke or the fall of a wicket. Then there is the annual regatta at Henley, when the boats and launches are so numerous that an adventurous spirit may cross the Thames by leaping from one to another. The regatta lasts three days and many spends these in house boats, sleeping on the deck in the delicious June weather, serenaded by itinerant minstrels or by parties of college men with blackened faces. American, French, German and Belgium crews compete at this regatta, though up to the present time the crack English eights have remained unbeaten. Another river function is the bumping races between the Oxford colleges, when London is partly denuded of fashionable folk for a couple of days. The boats start along the narrow Thames at short intervals apart, the college which was head on the preceding year again resuming this place, and so in order. Any boat which, after the simultaneous start, succeeds in touching the stern of the boat ahead of her, takes her place, while the defeated crew lose their post on the river. It is intensely interesting to watch the gradual approach of one boat upon another, the desperate attempt to win free of pursuit, the wild steering of the coxswain in the stern in order to escape that fatal 5c. cakes, thrill which is the signal for both crews to throw down their oars.

Sport exercises, indeed, at present, the chief part in the outdoor life of the winter amusements of hunting and shooting, the athletic idle Englishmen throws himself into the pastimes of driving and polo. The annual parade of the Coaching Club is attended by vast crowds. Polo is played in the club grounds at Hurlingham, Ranelagh and Roehampton. Ranelagh, not half an hour's drive from Piccadilly Circus, is an ideal spot on a sultry July afternoon, under the old trees upon the green lawns, clean-cut and springy as only an English lawn can become after a century or two of rolling and watering, or in a boat upon the lake, where the roar of the nearby city is unheard. Here the chief polo matches are played between members of the crack regiments, in front of the grand stand, with its royal box, which is infrequently graced by the presence of the king. Croquet is also played here, and there are driving competitions for ladies, horse and dog shows and balloon ascents, a form of enterprise which is rapidly becoming a craze in fashionable London, stage coach and automobile races. A band of one of the guards' regiments discourses music during these performances.

For those who cannot spare the time during the day in which to exercise there is the milder diversion of skating on real ice at Princes, which is open all through the summer and has turned out some first-class amateurs.

Perhaps the great national fete day however, is Derby Day, early in June. On that date no self-respecting Englishman would dream of going to work. Up till the death of Lord Palmerston parliament used to adjourn for this event annually. It is the one day celebrated with equal enthusiasm by rich and poor, by noble and plebian, but perhaps most of all by the humble, a ubiquitous costermonger, who takes his "missus" and the "nipper" for a spin in his little pushcart, drawn by the willing but purely overweighted "moke." It is hardly possible to describe the crush and confusion which on this day turn sedate Epsom into a carnival of licensed jollity. The course is crowded with minstrels, negroes, gypsy fortune-tellers, betting men, three-card men, fakirs, of every kind, walking among the horses' legs and between the carriages occupied by well-groomed men and women, shouting the rudest badinage to delicate ladies, who apparently enjoy the sport. Every train that leaves the platforms of the railway companies is an Epsom special. Every carriage is choked with a mass of humanity. In south London, Clapham Common and Kennington are black with people, and the roads are one endless procession of vehicles; four-in-hands, driven by white-hatted "swells," landaus, barouches, and costers' waggons, all of whom are cheered impartially by the dense crowds making their way on foot to the grounds. The return course is a slow one, for Bill and his brother punters who have won a few shillings on the races consider it their duty to "get out and give the moke a rest" at every public house—and public houses are almost thicker than blackberries along the Epsom road. Again, if Bill has not pulled off that little bit he had placed on the favorite, he gets out "just for luck," and with his "old woman" proceeds to drink to better luck on the next occasion, until only the sober moke, longing for his stable in Hoxton or the New Cut, Lambeth, stands between the party and complete disaster.

Then there are the races at Sandown and Newmarket, and above all at Ascot, "royal Ascot," as it is termed, because specially under the countenance of King Edward, himself, the chief patron of the English turf.

Society life is strenuous. The season is the time for all kinds of charitable, social, and financial enterprises. Huge bazaars are gotten up for eleemosynary purposes, at which ladies of title sell worthless articles at inflated prices; and should the king or queen be induced to attend an enormous financial recoupment may be confidently anticipated. Girls from the country take advantage of the opportunity afforded them to attend classes and lectures, and especially those concerts which have of recent years made London one of the most music-loving cities. Then there is the Royal Academy, with a host of minor picture galleries, principally along Bond street; there are the entertainments given by the art schools; and there are the numerous political leagues, which are in England largely controlled by women, such as the Women's Liberal and the Primrose League.

No wonder then that the close of this brief season of storm and stress brings with it the relaxation of the German "cures"; or that after the fatigues and efforts of summer the wealthy turn with relief to the quiet of their country homes, until reviving spring rekindles once again those burned-out ashes of social emulation.

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