

CORONATION OF GEORGE IV

Miss Elizabeth Robertson (1766–1858) to her mother

Tuesday, 24 July 1821

Here is the longest sheet I can find, and were it ten times longer, and had each of my ten fingers the pen of a Walter Scott busy at its point, the tenth part of all I have seen since this day ten days would hardly be told. Walter's pen alone can attempt, with any hopes of success, to give an idea of the witchery of the scene represented in Westminster Hall and Abbey. It was the realization of scenes he has given lively paintings of; but, as he confessed himself (for I had the happiness of having him next me for several hours during the King's banquet), far surpassing what imagination could form an idea of, except in a fairy-inspired dream. Several of the newspapers have given a very faithful account of all the marshalling of the procession, and all the forms and ceremonies, but as you will observe, if you read them, none of them have said one word of where or what your daughter was or did; that they have left for me to tell, and as I have survived to tell the tale after twenty-four hours of excitation, rejoicing, and the consequent fatigue, I may as well employ this, my first quiet hour, to say as much as I can, and to carry you along through the whole of my gay life.

I shall turn back to where I left Henry one day, when I was snatched away from him and Lady Willoughby's party just after I had, with nerves screwed to their utmost pitch, done the courageous thing to enter that magnificent palace, the residence of ancestors since the flood—through halls and stairs and troops of servants, I was ushered into a magnificent drawing-room, where numerous lords and ladies fair were in groups here and there and everywhere. Lady Perth was near the entrance... where I was presented to a little croodendoo of a woman that hardly reached my elbow; dressed like a true widow indeed... and then I saw Lady Elphinstone and her daughter, Miss Carmichael, and black Charlotte, who lives with Lady Willoughby, so very genteel—keeps her own carriage and footman, and is with her tail quite grand; and she was very good-natured, came and sat by me, and told me all the people. There was Lady Exeter and Lady Cecil, her *belle-fille*, and there was the Duke of Wellington's brother, Wellesley Pole (the day before created Lord Maryborough), and Miss Fitzroy, his niece, etc. Amongst the throng I saw a face quite familiar to me that tormented me to find out who she was or where I had seen her. She spoke to me, yet still I could not tell, but in the coach Lady P. told me, and it was that fine bust of a woman, from the chin downwards, that visited in our house when Elly was two-and-twenty months old, called Mrs. Villiers.

Well, at eleven o'clock we proceeded—after having seen the exhibition of the herb-women, who were all ladies (you must know Lady Willoughby is the hereditary lord Great Chamberlain of England, and her son, Lord Gwydyr, is only her deputy; they had come to show themselves to her, as she was not to go to the Coronation)—we proceeded to the Honorable Mrs. Stanhope's, where was a great rout in an elegant house, and there were Lady Hertford and the Duchess of Richmond, and heaps of my new grand acquaintances. Lord Saint Helens and I were again comrades, a very gentle, oldish Sea Lord; but tell Hunt nowhere except in the procession of peers have I again set eyes on Lord Glenburnie. Home we went at the small hours. You may guess my bed a blythe sight to me after all I had gone through that day.

Wednesday, the town took the most wonderful appearance; there, from our windows, we saw the Scots Greys scampering by one way and the Life Guards another, two or three regiments inspecting in the Park, drums beating, trumpets sounding, coaches-and-four rattling by, filled with nobles arriving, lamps putting up for the illuminations, Congreve busy just under us preparing his fireworks, millions of people hurrying, wherever there was anything to look at, showmen on stages, and fowls jumping. In short, such a hubbub as was enough to drive any sober head from the country mad, except mine, which I continue to keep always very sane on my shoulders. Lady Perth going out on some business, I sat down in the full sight of all and wrote the scrawl to Hunt, which a member came in very opportunely to frank. The coach came, and off we set to go to see many people and the outside of Westminster, which was a perfect curiosity with scaffolding, but such the immensity of the crowd we never could pass Charing Cross. In coming along Pall Mall we fell in with such a show! Just as we approached the palace we saw it was levée-day, and at that moment all the foreign princes in their state carriages, and attended by their state-dressed servants, came in a train past us, and no words can describe the glare of these carriages. The Duc de Gramont's was bright geranium color, covered with coronets and borders of the most brilliant enamel, the livery bright yellow, with crimson satin linings and covered with silver. Some were bright green and purple, with lilac servants, covered with gold—in short, it was perfectly dazzling, and more gaudy than the Croesus on Hansel Monday. As the Duc de Gramont passed me in his golden jacket, I could not help thinking, “changed days with you, Mr. Pamela, since you and I last parted (as Marianne will well recollect) in the striking style, close by our Abbey of Holyrood.”

After much driving, we came home to an early dinner at six o'clock. Lady Elphinstone and her son the young lord, and daughter, and young Stewart of Gairntully dined, and they all went and Lady Perth to a party at nine, and I, after laying my coronation robes in order to be ready, to my bed as fast as I could and got in by ten. I had just fallen fast asleep when I was awoken by a candle and maid at my bedside. "Is it half-past two?" said I. "Oh no," said she, "only eleven; but there is a beautiful young gentleman in the drawing-room going mad to see you, and to hear about his ticket for the coronation." This was John Pringle. I could only with my eyes half open tell where Lady Perth was, and off he set and left me to repose till a quarter before two, when up I got (a lovely moon), and at that hour, carriages beginning to pass down by Park Lane, with court plumes in them, although the doors of the hall were not to be open till four. I dressed very smart in my new white satin, with all the white feathers I could catch and all the brilliant things. I had a beautiful hothouse bouquet to match my trimming. I eat a breakfast I had bespoke overnight—a large mess of sago, with wine and sugar and a biscuit. Just when it was over, a message came from Lady Morton that Admiral Halkett was coming in for me. In his full uniform he appeared chapeau bas, and we met the carriage at the door, come with General Brown and Helen Home, and off we drove.

At Hyde Park Corner we caught the string of carriages and got into our place. It then struck four, and we were two miles from the hall. Our way (there were five different ways) was down Grosvenor Street and to the side of the Thames, by which we traveled at the rate of a mile an hour, the carriages extending in one close string that length before us, and as far behind. The morning was quite inspiring, and the breezes from the river acted on us like champagne. The crowd was immense on both sides, and at that early hour thousands of nice-dressed misses were walking on the pavements, and all the windows filled with people, every human being in the highest spirits and best humor. The Hussars and fierce-looking Cuirassiers had nothing to do but look beautiful in their full costume and armed cap-à-pie, scampering about, their immense plumes floating in the morning breeze. Exactly at six we reached the Hall gate, and were as quietly set down as ever I was at Lady Mary Clark's rout.

But here came the moment big, as I thought, with my ruin; for when our tickets were examined by an elegant page in scarlet and gold, mine was for Lord Gwydyr's box, and all the other four for the place destined for the peers' friends. My heart died within me when, without the stop of a moment, a page presented his arm to me, and I was torn from my friends. This page was a navy captain, and friend of the admiral's, so he had only time to say, "Take care of the lady," when a call of the "Princess Augusta" made everyone stand round as far as they could, and the sweetest-looking, unassuming princess was squeezed close against my arm. My page and I followed her, and we entered an anteroom behind the throne. She soon reached her seat on the right of it. I had to promenade past it, and down the steps and all along the Hall, and then up a stair and along a passage till my page placed me where the ticket directed, in the chamberlain's box, and bowing, left me to my fate. At first all my senses were scattered, and I only had as much gumption as to think, "Here am I to sit amongst perfect strangers for twenty-four hours, and never again see my friends;" but being a composed creature, I soon gathered my scattered ideas, and on looking round, found the following people near me—viz., Lady Elphinstone, her son, daughter, and Charlotte Elliot, Abercainey, his wife and Miss Erskine, James Hunter Blair, William Wauchope, and Mrs. Spottiswood. Can you conceive such luck? Besides them there were about a hundred Englishers, peeresses, that had preferred it to their own seats, that they might be near their daughters. All the rest were peers' daughters. Lady Gwydyr herself was in a box near the throne, called the royal, because the King named who should be asked there. It was filled with all the ministers' wives, blazing like jewels, the favorite and her daughters, and all the beauties to the amount of twenty-five only. My seat was quite to my taste, being exactly the centre of the Hall, and the second row, with a niece of the Duke of Wellington before me, who had young feathers. She obligingly always gave me plenty of room to come front when I liked; indeed, never, I dare say, was there such a family of love as all London exhibited that day—everybody spoke to their neighbor as if they had been born brothers. The mob did nothing worse than say how elegant and beautiful we were, and the pickpockets were so busy being happy, they kept their ready fingers out of their neighbors' pie, for never was there known on any day fewer accidents or transgressions.

We had to amuse ourselves the best way we could from six to eight, and Queen Caroline did her best to amuse us. There came a sough to the Hall that the queen was come down, and that she had got into the Abbey alone. Just as the crowded boxes and galleries were all murmuring about this news, we were electrified by a thundering knock at the Hall door, and a voice from without loudly said, "The Queen, open." A hundred red pages ran to the door, which the porter opened a little, and from where I sat I got a glimpse of her, leaning on Lord —, followed by Lady — and Lady —, standing behind the door on their own ten toes, with the crossed bayonets of the sentry under her chin. She was raging and storming and vociferating, "Let me pass; I am your Queen, I am Queen of Britain." The Lord High Chamberlain was with the King, but he sent his deputy, who, with a voice that made all the Hall ring, cried, "Do your duty, shut the Hall door," and immediately the red pages slapped it in her face! By the time she got where I saw

her there was not a creature at her heels but Lady — and trollop Lady —, so that no one had the least fear of the consequence of a door being banged in the face of the Queen of Britain!

As you would see by the papers, the King entered the Hall about nine o'clock. After all the procession had been marshalled in the Hall, and it was so bright and light where I sat, I was so near the assembled nobles that I could have spoken to them all, but I only had nods from those I knew. It was a most imposing sight. Everything that was grand or noble in our noble island, in that noblest of all halls, glittering with gold, silver, and precious stones, ten million [sic!] of plumes slightly waving in the morning breeze, admitted by the high Gothic windows being open in the roof. Rising at once as the King entered, at the same moment the flue band played "God save the King." The prayer was granted, for although much agitated at first, almost to fainting, he soon recovered, and looking round, held out his hand to the Duke of York, who with zeal and great affection bent as he took it and pressed it to his good fat heart. The King then good-naturedly spoke to all his little pages and train-bearers; one of them was Lord D., the Duke of Wellington's son, whom he shook by the hand. The procession then moved on exactly as described by the newspapers, and when the King rose again, we all did. It is impossible to conceive the beauty of the scene. The King looked with great exultation, and as he passed under me, I almost heard what he said to the Archbishop of Canterbury, as he pointed first to the one side and then to the other where the ladies sat, gave a look of admiration, and clasped his hands. So collected was he that at that moment he observed the beautiful Miss Seymour, who has been brought up by Mrs. Fitzherbert, and kindly smiled and nodded. She stood exactly next me, by which means I caught a bit of his smile, and it did my heart good to see him look so happy. It was about ten, I fancy, when he passed to the Abbey, and from my place I saw the procession for as long a way as from our house to Lady Purves', taking that sort of turn up the platform, and beautiful it looked, glittering in the bright sunshine through the high Gothic gateway.

For many hours I had been delightfully seated between two such agreeable Englishmen, my Scotch ones having been squeezed away by the fate of woe. The one was Colonel Cotton of the Guards, a particular friend of the King's, and I thought the most agreeable man I ever met with, and on mentioning so to Lady Perth, she said I was quite right, he was accounted the very pleasantest man in London. On my other hand was another almost as delightful, an acquaintance of Cotton's, who always called him Lord Charles. They knew every living soul, and took such pains to point them all out to me, and during our long morning seat we had so much conversation on every subject, such fun and laughing, I never spent so pleasant a five hours in my life.

But now came my difficulties. I had a ticket for the Abbey. About one-half of the Hall company moved off there, but, alas! I was far from my admiral, and I had discovered neither Cotton nor Lord Charles's tickets went to the same place with mine. If I could have had courage to ask either of them to take me with them! Cotton had Lady Augusta, his wife, and Lord Charles had a young missie of a daughter, and both were afterwards in despair when they found I had a ticket and did not go, which I could have done with Lady Elphinstone, but I perfectly lost courage, for the crowded passages, and the fear of never getting back to my delightful seat, and to see the champion and banquet. After hesitating, I at last let Lady E. and black Charlotte go without me, and, sure enough, they never could reach their good seats again, as naturally those left in the box took the best. Mine was so good I did not change it, but left my shawl on it while we went about to amuse ourselves. Some scampering about there was in search of food. About twelve o'clock my hunger became so outrageous I verily thought I would have died. I had stretched myself out to try and sleep and forget it when a most entertaining page (they were all gentlemen) had his dinner brought to him, as he did not dare to leave his post at our box door. He asked me to partake of it, which I most joyfully accepted, and he cut up his cold fowl with a penknife, and gave me all the breast on a lump of bread. Never had I tasted anything half so delicious. I was forced to offer some to Lady Middleton and the Misses Broderick, and some friends who were next me. They spared my hen, someone having gone for something for them; but the Duke of Wellington's niece was glad of a bit, and his niece I did not grudge it on. I was quite another creature after this banquet, and could with more patience see the King's laid out on the tables under us.

We really did get good fun during our wait, and at two o'clock the guns firing told us the crown was fairly on the head of the 4th George. I, and all my friends around, began next to suffer from thirst. Many set out in search of water, but my page touched me on the shoulder and asked if I could drink ale, and a large tumbler of that liquid went over like nectar; but a little after, a tumbler of Madeira was the true ambrosia. The exhaustion was so great, I might have drunk a gallon. A French nobleman gave me two oranges and a biscuit. I rather thought monsieur took a fancy for me, and I shall never forget his real kindness. This comfortable feed being over, the peeresses and folks began to come hurrying back from the Abbey, and then it was "he to a seat, and she to a seat, and *highle mickle* to a seat." I was as well-pleased I had not left mine, as few people had got a good one at the Abbey, owing to those people who

had only Abbey tickets being before them. When all were again seated, and more than the all that went away, I looked and saw my Cotton at my back, so happy to meet again that we shook hands!

Now was the sight of sights. All the marshaled peers entered and ranged themselves, forming a noble hedge on each side of the hall, their coronets now on their heads. Never shall I forget the Grand Cross Knights, each with about fifty, some sixty, long white feathers in their hats, which the air tossed in all directions, as three and three they all entered under the arch, many of them with honorable scars, some with wooden legs, some without an arm—all of them having served their King and country. First of the princes came Leopold, and being a Knight of the Garter, his robes were dark blue, which amongst all the crimson looked very well, and suited his melancholy cast of countenance. Many feelings were expressed on his fine countenance. At last the King—now an anointed one—his royal diadem on his head and crimson robe exchanged for the imperial purple, under his canopy of burnished gold entered the gate. But oh! the feelings of the moment when that immense multitude outside and inside the hall burst forth as if with one voice, “God save the King! Long live our King!” and the trumpets sounded, and the music struck up “God save the King!” The ladies waved their handkerchiefs, the men their hats, the knights their many feathers, the soldiers their helmets, whereat Walter Scott, who by that time had got on my right hand, could alone make anyone not present comprehend the splendor or the feeling with which the scene was seen. To the papers you must go for all that was done on his return. I shall only tell you what I felt, when at last I saw the Duke of Wellington on his prancing war-horse, the stirrup held by his little silver page, Lord Chorley, his youngest son! I really could have eat up the boy, he looked so enchanting and so like an-other Wellington, so undaunted as the horse pranced, he minded not his own little feet. They favored us four times, riding up and backing out before and after each course, between the courses, and the champion came attended by the Duke and Lord Howard, and, poor lad, he really did it well, and carried off a handsome gold cup for his pains, no one gainsaying him. It was delightful to watch Walter Scott’s face when he saw the reality of what he has described, and much it lightened up as the Duke of Argyle, sword in hand, with such royal grace walked up the hall. Walter and I at one moment exclaimed, “MacCallum More;” and Glengarry, in full Highland costume, likewise made Walter’s eye blink, he brought the Land of Cakes so favorably before us. The Duke of Athole, with his falcons on his hand, likewise moved our Scotch hearts—in short, it was all like a beauteous, splendid dream, and I awoke and wondered for the first time how my party and I were once again to meet. I have no room for all the huzzaing of the King we did, but I must say nothing could be more affecting or more graceful and royal than the manner the King rose. After we had all joined the choristers in singing “God save the King,” raising his hands, he pronounced in a full manly voice that was heard all over the Hall, “God bless my peers and all my people,” and seizing a golden cup, bowed all round and drank. I am sure even you must have heard in your dining-room the burst of acclamation that succeeded.

When everything was over, I looked towards my friends on the opposite side. The admiral pointed to the Hall, I understood him and instantly nodded, and, attended by a page, reached it with ease. Sir Alexander Don met me and gave me his arm till my party came down their stair. We then enjoyed a royal rout. All sorts of people crowded the Hall, peers and peeresses, bishops and cuirassiers, French and Spaniards, Persians and Medes, for all I knew—in fact, the best rout I ever was at; and then one met and shook hands with friends, and a lovely bishop gave me a large glass of wine-and-water, and we walked towards the throne, and saw the King sitting with a most comfortable face, enjoying the scene, and that it was near bedtime and all well over. Just as he prepared to retire, we hurried away, and, arm-in-arm with the admiral, we reached the gate at the House of Lords. A policeman called our servants. They both instantly appeared. The carriage was exactly a mile from the door. Away we walked, a heavenly evening. The mob, perfect lambs, did nothing but admire how beautiful we were. We got the carriage—it had room to turn. We left the string and got safe home. In half an hour a nice dinner at nine o’clock at Lady Morton’s. Went home at ten, found a smart party of all the Percys of Northumberland assembled to see the fireworks in the Park, which were superb, and Allan might well have said, “It was £50 not ill spent.” More than ten thousand people were standing under us, all in good humor and quietness. Lady Perth was dining with Mrs. Fitzherbert. I had to do the honors to the Percys. They went at 11.30. I wrote to Jane Campbell to let her know all was safe. Lady P. came. I had to tell my news. Went to my room and undressed at the window that I might not miss the fireworks, and into my bed more dead than alive, exactly twenty-four hours after rising. I slept like a stone, drove all over the town next day, dined with a pleasant party at Becky Scott’s, and came home to dress for the Gwydyr’s grand rout. Lady P. not well, could not go, went to bed instead. Next night the Opera, crowded to excess; all the royal family there, loyalty excessive; “God save the King,” encored, sung by the whole house. At church; Park; to the Duke of Buccleugh’s in the evening. Packed on Monday morning. So ends my tale and paper. Tell Mrs. Blair that I have got a lovely watered tabby which all the London ladies make their pelisses of.