

Description of a Dinner Party at Woburn Abbey attended by Queen Victoria¹

My dearest Maria,²

Thy very welcome letter arrived on first day morning and truly glad we were to hear about thee—it seemed long since we parted and now it seems such a while since this day week. I am afraid thou wast sadly tired with the walk to Reeds³ after such a day of travelling and fatigue, however I was thankful thou hadst arrived in safety.

After thou had left, I felt very flat, so I persuaded thy Aunt to accompany me to the Park to endeavour to gain another look at our Queen. We had a pleasant walk there but after waiting, I should think almost an hour, we left the Abbey. I felt inclined to see Jas Forbes if I could, but Maria⁴ preferred returning home at once and I could not persuade her to wait with me a little longer—not hardly a quarter of an hour after she had left me I met him and he most politely invited and urged me to stay awhile at his house as the Queen intended taking a ride early in the afternoon, so I did wait and had a capital view of her as she drove off from the vestibule.

J. Forbes then told me he could not allow me to return home to tea as he had just rec^d a most kind offer from Mr. Stanhope (brother to the Duchess) to bring four or five friends to the Abbey at 8 oclk to see the Queen and all the nobility at Dinner—and he invited me to be one of the party. This was too tempting to be refused, so I took tea with him & his family and about $\frac{1}{2}$ past 7 we went to

¹ From the original lent by Henry Corder, of Bridgwater. The notes have been compiled from *Micah Corder* by Francis Corder Clayton, privately printed, 1885.

² Maria Thorp (born 1809), daughter of Thomas and Abigail Thorp (*née* Corder), of Chelmsford.

³ "Reeds," the name of the farm-house, at Roxwell, a village near Chelmsford, the home of Thomas and Mary Corder and their family.

⁴ Maria Corder (born 1793), daughter of John and Ruth Corder, and therefore sister to the writer of the letter. She lived at Dunstable.

the Abbey and saw the dinner table set ready, and such a splendid sight I never witnessed before.

There were to be 26 of the party—it was a long table oval at each end—from nearly one end of the table to the other stood a magnificent plateau of silver, most richly chased, on which stood vases of alabaster filled with the most exquisite artificial flowers, between which were interspersed figures of the Graces & Heroes, animals, &c all in alabaster—with small lamps of a most delicate description throwing a pale light over the whole. This plateau occupied so much of the table that only room enough was left round the sides for the plates, glasses &c to stand with one dish at each end.

All the plates, dishes and covers were that night of silver—the evening previous every thing was gold—thou mayst form some idea of the quantity when I tell thee that it occupied the waiters *two hours & a half* to carry the plate for dinner from the butler's pantry to the dining room—and when I saw the room all this was arranged on side tables. There were a great many splendid massive salvers placed round the room, I suppose chiefly for show. Altogether it was far too gorgeous for description. As it was near 8 o'clk. we went down to the hall to be out of the way, and when the clock struck, the Band played “God save the Queen” and the party immediately entered the dining room.

When the first course was removing we were allowed to go up, and by standing in the adjoining room we could peep thro' without being perceived. The Queen & Prince sat at the centre of the table on the right hand side, the Duke of Bedford on the left of the Queen and the Duchess by the Prince. The Duke of Wellington exactly opposite the Queen. Many others we could easily distinguish. The Queen was the most simply attired of all the ladies, she wore a black satin dress made very plain—nothing over her shoulders, and round her neck a plain black necklace united by a small black heart—her hair combed quite straight and a wreath of small white roses round her head; she looked very sweet—tho' she is certainly a very plain person. The Prince looked *really beautiful*; I think I never saw a young man look so interesting and handsome.

We were amused to see how all the company seemed to be enjoying their dinner, they ate very heartily and without any ceremony—indeed I thought the Queen took her food almost vulgarly fast, her mouth is not pretty when she is eating. Some of the ladies were much more dressed than the Queen, particularly about the head, the Duchess of Sutherland looked splendid.

I cannot tell thee how I longed for thee to be with me, it was all I seemed to want. After we had staid as long as we thought prudent we were allowed to see the dessert all ready to be carried up. It was most beautiful, every thing, plates, dishes, &c., rich cut glass. The dishes contained pine apples, grapes, melons, peaches, nectarines, preserved fruits and many things we could not tell any thing about. There were sweetmeats of the most fantastic description—standing *a foot* high, of divers colours and as thin as bonnet wire but quite stiff and indeed more like wire than anything else; the fruit knives & forks of gold with jasper handles of the most exquisite beauty. I certainly never imagined any thing could be so splendid as the whole set out was, it is quite beyond my power of description. . . . we hear the Queen was so well pleased that she talks of coming again another year, but many doubt whether the Duke will wish for the honour again very soon—some say it has cost them £30,000, but we think 10,000 more likely. . . . Forbes says there were 150 beds made up at the Abbey. . . .

I remain thy ever tenderly attached

8th mo. 4th 1841

Aunt Lucy.⁵

[Addressed]

Mary Corder,⁶

Roxwell Road,

Chelmsford,

Essex.

M. Thorp.²

⁵ Lucy Corder, daughter of John and Ruth Corder, married in 1836 to William F. How, of Aspley Guise, Beds. She was sister to Susanna Corder, the well-known Quaker writer.

⁶ Mary Shewell married, in 1809, Thomas Corder, son of John and Ruth Corder, and was therefore Aunt to the recipient of the letter, Maria Thorp.