

HIGH SOCIETY

1. An account of the Le Vert Reception

... At the close of 1866 Mrs. Acklen gave the reception "complimentary to Madame Le Vert," preparations for which caused no small excitement in the business streets of Nashville. It was called "the forerunner of a new régime of entertainments, combining intellectual and artistic enjoyment with perfect taste." The observatory, groves, and parterres were illuminated, and the effect of the light among the statues, shrubbery, and flowers, with music from the portico, was fairy-like. The beautiful hostess wore the dress of pearl-colored satin, trimmed with richest point d'Alençon, in which she had been presented at the French court, with a coronet of diamonds, and diamond necklace and bracelets. Ladies were there from Memphis and from Kentucky; and the sister and nieces of the hostess were greatly admired.

From: Mrs. Elizabeth Fries Ellet, *The Queens of American Society* (Philadelphia, 1867), pp. 419-20.

2. An account of the Cheatham Wedding Reception

Wedding Festivities—Dr. and Mrs. W. A. Cheatham's Reception Last Night.—The grand reception following upon the marriage ceremonies which so recently united Dr. W. A. Cheatham to Mrs. Adelia Acklin, took place last night at their palatial home near this city. It was every way a magnificent affair, attended by a large number of prominent persons, not only of the fashionable, but of the political and commercial world.

As the lovely gardens came in view by the turnings and windings of the road, a scene of dazzling splendor met the eye. From every tree, and every shrub, and every bush within that beautiful enclosure, lights were flashing, some of them fiery red, others soft and pale, while others in welcome threw their bright blue beams across the winding walks and through the darkened foliage, dancing and glimmering out into the gloom of night, as if in rivalry of the millions of faintly twinkling stars that were struggling among the clouds over-head.

Every window of the mansion seemed ablaze, and the sound of floating music was the first that greeted the ears of the guests as the long lines of crowded carriages filed up to the broad granite walk leading to the house, where Marshals Hobson, Tignor, Spain and Sturtevant were stationed to direct and assist wherever their good services might be required.

At an early hour guests began to arrive, and as fast as they came were ushered into the spacious reception room, where they were cordially welcomed by the bride and bridegroom, and congratulations were showered upon the happy pair as greetings were exchanged.

Mrs. Cheatham's dress was a rich, heavy, flowing white silk, while a magnificent veil of Brussels point lace floated over her shoulders. Upon her head a coronet sat gracefully, the gift of the Emperor and Empress of France, and a girdle with a diamond clasp encircled her waist. She looked lovely and happy, and was the cynosure of all eyes.

Dr. Cheatham, the bridegroom, was dressed in black, relieved by a waistcoat of snowy whiteness, and a neat white tie. A pleasing smile rested upon his features as he grasped the hands of the friends who crowded closely around him to offer their congratulations, and all pronounced him a most happy man.

Invitations had been sent to fifteen hundred persons, and the luxurious parlors were thronged with guests, many of them from abroad. Joy and mirth seemed to move in the very air, and the portrait faces that looked down from the walls seemed to have been suddenly instilled with life, and looked smiling upon the happy gathering. Most of the ladies present were richly dressed—everyone of them was beautiful. There may have been individual differences of opinion as to the brightness of certain sparkling eyes, or the rich color that flushed the cheek of some pretty favorite, but a strict observer could hardly deny the claims of all. No one ever writes how handsome the gentlemen appear on such occasions, but it will not be out of place to say that the representatives of the sterner sex at the reception last night deserve a share of the general admiration.

Among the guests from abroad, we noticed Gen. D. H. Hill, Gen. Basil Duke, Gen. J. B. Palmer, Hon. Ed. Cooper; Judge Meeker, of Missouri; Col. Hill, of Franklin; Jno. Overton, Jr., Mrs. Jno. Overton, Col. Rice, Mrs. Brinkley, and Mrs. Col. McDonald, of Memphis; Capt. Fields of Pulaski; Capt. Pointer and lady, and Mrs. Perkins, of Franklin; Mrs. Guyon, daughter of Judge Guyon, of Louisiana. Others not home folks, were present, with whose names we were unacquainted.

The tables were crowded with everything that luxury and good taste could desire, and their riches excited general comment. The whole affair was one well worthy the occasion and one which will long be remembered by those who participated in its pleasures. Only midnight closed the festivities, and a regretful sound seemed mingled with the rattle of the swiftly moving carriage wheels as they left the scenes of festivity and whirled the guests to their quiet homes.

From: Newspaper clipping, 1867, in scrapbook in possession of Dr. Mack Wayne Craig.

AN ACCOUNT FROM A CRITICAL FOREIGNER

... We went to visit the show-place of Nashville, a residence about a couple of miles from the town. In point of situation it was charming, and the grounds tastefully laid out, such as one might see in a thousand English country homes—fine green lawn, and pretty flowers, greenhouse, etc., etc.; but the whole beauty was destroyed by a Cockney display of plaster casts and iron statues. There were two enormous lions at the foot of the steps leading up to the house, and two stags at the top! My horse took fright at them, and nearly threw me on to their uncomfortable-looking antlers. A couple of yards away there was a plaster cast of a spotted Dalmatian coach dog, and, crouching in the grass, lay a tiger, painted yellow. Dianas, Apollos, Neptunes, etc., abounded; in fact, a small plaster of Paris mythology was distributed about the grounds, which covered some eight or ten acres. The house was a square brick building, moderately large, and painted to represent brown stone.

The interior was so profoundly dark and so crammed with furniture, that I made a most ungraceful entrée over a *petit Samuel* at prayer on the floor. Fortunately, as we afterwards discovered, there was no one in the room. The negro servant having left us, we groped about for a seat, afraid of sitting in some one's lap or getting impaled on the antlers of a stag. When the negro returned to announce that his mistress would be with us directly, he let in for our benefit a glimmer of light through one of the windows, which were richly draped with heavy Algerian-striped damask, lined and deeply fringed—this in June, with the thermometer at 90°! The greater part of the furniture was in the Louis XIV. style, and had evidently been brought from Paris. It was fit only for mid-winter, and its stuffiness was painful to contemplate. The walls were covered with pictures and family portraits, consisting of the mistress of the house, her various husbands (she was said to have had four), and their children. Some of the copies of Italian masters were nearly as bad as the family portraits, Beatrice Cenci looking capable of every meanness under the sun. The rooms were rather small, and the pictures so large and in such tremendous gilt frames, that they had the effect of a house insecurely built of pictures.

Such was the specimen shown to me of Southern wealth and luxury; and no doubt a great deal of money had been wasted upon it. It was an attempt to rival the splendour of a nobleman's mansion, the result being only an imitation of a lavishly-bedecked Cockney villa.

I at once recognized in it the original of a gorgeous dwelling I had just been reading of in a novel, which described the wealth, refinement, and Oriental splendour of Southern homes. The marbles and pictures were said to be in the style of the Borghese Palace, near Rome, or the Dorea Pamphile, or the Corso. But as compared with these, or any other European mansion, the place I had been visiting was a mere burlesque. Yet, wherever I went in Tennessee, I was sure to hear of this beau idéal of splendour, and until I had seen it, I imagined that the novelist who described it had dealt in the wildest fiction, for which she had not the slightest foundation, or had mistaken her *locale*, placing it in Southern America instead of South Italy.

From: Thérèse Yelverton, *Teresina in America* (London, 1875), I, 250-2.