

the Palace Theatre, all box-office records were broken during her engagement, and the shareholders received 33 per cent dividends. (One Saturday night there were eighty applications for boxes from the social elite of London.)

Flower-pot statuettes of Maud in her most striking poses were for sale in many gift shops of fashionable Bond Street. Fashion-conscious women adopted sandals – even, on a dare, in ballrooms – and went about their daily routine bare-legged and bare-footed. The smart dress of the day was skin-tight, the lining forming a divided skirt, with a large square tab of embroidery in front. Even costume jewellers looked to Maud for inspiration. Their best seller was a large string of beads worked into a shaped design and adorned with three immense jewel-covered bosses, two of which were worn as breastplates. The popularity of sequins gave way to bead fringes and bead trimmings.²⁰ (Meanwhile, Maud took care to dress with impeccable taste off stage. She soon became, if not an arbiter, a prominent figure in the world of fashion.)

Other signs of her success were numerous burlesques and parodies of *The Vision*. The Alhambra Theatre featured a very successful *Sal Oh Mee*, and the well-established parodist Pelisser had a field day imitating Maud's performance. To these off-shoots neither Maud nor the Palace management took exception.²¹

Amongst those inspired by but not competing directly with her was Lady Constance Stewart Richardson, a refreshingly deviant member of the British aristocracy. She held advanced views on religion, radical but not very fruitful ideas on education, and original opinions on women's place in society, all vigorously expounded in her book *Dancing Beauty and Games*. Lady Constance was also an outstanding swimmer. In the summer of 1908, her hobby horse was classical dancing. In July, she was invited to a weekend house party to meet King Edward VII. After dinner Lady Constance suddenly appeared, wearing an exact replica of the Salome costume, right down to the bare limbs and barbaric jewellery. Her impersonation duly ap-

plauded, she dramatically threw herself at the king's feet and rested her head on his knee. During the silence that greeted such familiarity, Lady Constance looked up at the king and firmly said, "Sire, I claim the head of Sir Ernest Cassell," one of the wealthiest men in England and father of the late Countess Mountbatten of Burma. An embarrassed titter ran through the room until it became obvious that the king was unamused. He was sensitive about such close friends as Cassell. At this point the hostess bravely stepped forth to suggest the bridge tables be set up, a diversion that soon restored the king to good humour and Lady Constance to his good graces.

With her social skills, her mysterious appeal, and the king's interest, Maud was quickly accepted by London society. One of her more consequential contacts was Herbert Asquith, who had become prime minister of a Liberal government in April 1908. Equally well known was her intimate yet indefinable relationship with Asquith's wife, Margot.

Before she became widower Asquith's wife, Margot had freely associated with a group of unorthodox women dubbed the Souls. Even as the prime minister's wife, she attracted a distinct coterie of female friends, among whom, for a time, was Maud Allan. Both Asquiths took her under their wing. On one occasion, for example, the prime minister seated her between the Austrian ambassador and himself, as she was graceful and charming, fluently bilingual, and a very good listener. On another occasion – Maud delighted in recounting this incident – Mrs. Asquith placed her next to Winston Churchill at dinner. Affronted that Churchill took no notice of her, Maud broke the ice as she left with the other ladies for the drawing room. "Well," she said to Mr. Churchill, "we do not seem to have found much to say to each other this evening." Mr. Churchill looked at her indifferently, nodding stiffly. "But," Maud pointed out, "we have at least one thing in common." Barely giving Churchill time to ask, Maud explained: "We are both the rejected of Manchester." Shortly before, about the time