

I stepped gingerly off the boat and walked into the Great Hall of the Westminster Palace. I had never been in such a huge, noisy, colourful place before. As we went in, there was a roar of sound – a terrible echoing din – that made me want to cover my ears. Hundreds of voices spiralled around – laughter and gossip, high chattering of children, music from trumpets and tabors, and the whining and yapping of dogs. Crowds of courtiers strolled around in their bright satins and velvets, nodding their fine feathered hats at each other. The ladies wore gowns the colours of apples and raspberries, lavender and mint, forget-me-nots and dog roses. Everyone smelled of the spiced pomanders that they carried. Servants in green

livery held up branches of candles, and the
golden light danced and flickered on the
wood-panelled walls.