

herself on her knees beside his bed, she begged to kiss his hand as the first and most devoted of his subjects. Alfonso sleepily put out the hand demanded of him, and fell asleep again. But the next day all was bustle. He had to make preparations for his journey to Spain, and, above all, to be provided with a captain-general's uniform. So hastily was this done that the hat was forgotten, and he reached Barcelona with only the college cap of a student of Sandhurst. It was, however, easy to procure in Barcelona a general's headgear, no country in Europe being so well equipped as Spain with every grade of general. Alfonso was then seventeen years of age, and had been absent from Spain rather more than six years. In spite of all precautions, his train received some scattering shots from Carlist guerillas.

When Alfonso had reigned three years, it became an object of primary importance that he should be married. The second daughter of the Duke of Montpensier and of his aunt, Louisa Fernanda de Borbon, was named Maria de las Mercedes,—our Lady of Mercy. She was about eighteen. Alfonso had been the bosom friend of her beloved brother and playfellow, Don Ferdinand, and had seen much of Mercedes when as a little boy in France he was almost daily with his cousins. From a very early age he had declared that little Mercedes and no other should be his wife.

According to Spanish court etiquette there was no possible chance for any word in private passing between the lovers, but they understood and trusted each other. At a country party Alfonso manoeuvred to whisper in German to Mercedes, "Let them say what they will, I will marry none but you." She laid her finger on her

lips and looked up at him archly, that was all.

As Mercedes came to be known, she endeared herself to her people. The wedding took place in January 1878. All Madrid was festive and sympathetic. The wedding presents were superb. Queen Victoria sent a splendid bracelet of diamonds to the bride. The Prince of Wales sent a scimitar, in a sheath studded with jewels, to the bridegroom. The procession to the church was very splendid, and the young king and queen returned together in a carriage panelled with glass, and drawn by eight milk-white horses.

Mercedes enjoyed five brief months of unclouded happiness, and then came the end. She was prostrated by gastric fever, and after a short illness died. We bow to the Love and the Wisdom that sends such catastrophes; yet I can never think of Mercedes' death without remembering the lines of Coleridge :

Besides,—what grieved us most,—we knew
They had no need of such as you

In the place where you were going.

On earth are angels all too few,

While heav'n is overflowing.

Between husband and wife there had been love,—deep, simple, and sincere. The warm, generous disposition of Alfonso and the calm, serene, confiding character of his bride, animated by a natural bright mirthfulness, seemed to promise a long life of domestic happiness; for Mercedes had the "*mens sana in corpore sano*." Spain had witnessed little married happiness among her rulers.

She died, sweet, loving, and beloved Mercedes, with all the world so bright about her, on June 25, 1878. To the last her husband hung over her bed, calling upon her name, "Mercedes ! Mercedes mia !" To the last her eyes were turned on him with love. He said