

OUR SOVEREIGN LADY.

(By the Author of "English Hearts and English Hands.")

CHAPTER IV.—THE GREAT SORROW.

On the 9th of February, 1861, the eve of the twenty-first anniversary of her wedding, the Queen wrote to her uncle, King Leopold: "Very few can say, with me, that their husband, at the end of twenty-one years, is not only full of the friendship, kindness, and affection which a truly happy marriage brings with it, but of the same tender love as in the very first days of our marriage!"

This year, which began so brightly, was, nevertheless, carrying concealed beneath its shadowy mantle the dark burden of sorrow and loss that, alas! was thenceforward to rest on the heart of our beloved Queen. Death, then for the first time, crossed over into the innermost circle of her life. In March, the Duchess of Kent passed quietly away, having sunk into unconsciousness, before the Queen and the Prince Consort, who had been hastily summoned, could reach her side. They both, with Princess Alice, watched beside the dying one throughout that weary night, the Queen in the anguish of feeling that her mother did not even "know the child she had ever received with such tender smiles." In the early morning the Duchess died. "Her gentle spirit at rest, her sufferings over," wrote her bereaved daughter. "But I—I, wretched child, who had lost the mother I so tenderly loved, from whom for these forty-one years I had never been parted, except for a few weeks, what was my case?... The blessed future meeting, and her peace and rest, must henceforward, be my comfort." Prince Albert, writing at this time, says of the Queen: "Her grief is extreme;.... for the last two years her constant care and occupation have been to keep watch over her mother's comfort." The expressions of respectful sympathy with the royal mourners from both Houses of Parliament, and throughout the country, were very soothing to their sorrowful feelings.

In the following month of May, the Queen's own month, the Princess Alice's intended marriage with Prince Louis of Hesse-Darmstadt was made known to the nation, and it was the brightest gleam in that sad year. The war in America had begun, and its effect was severely felt in all the great centres of the cotton industry. The Prince Consort foresaw the probable distress that was coming upon Lancashire, and busied himself beforehand in planning measures of relief. In the early autumn another visit was paid to Ireland, and there the Prince Consort passed his last birthday. "This is the dearest of days," wrote the Queen, "and one that fills my heart with love, and gratitude, and emotion. God bless and protect for ever my beloved Albert, the best and purest of human beings."

Once again the Royal Family spent a happy time at their loved Balmoral, enjoying freedom from the cares of State, in the exhilarating freshness of the Scottish breezes, and the beauties of purple hills, granite mountains, wild moors, and rushing rivers.

They returned to Windsor Castle in October, and about the middle of the following month, the state of the Prince Consort's health awakened anxious fears in the heart of the devoted wife. There were various causes of anxiety and sorrow weighing upon them; amongst others the illness of the Princess Royal, which tended to depress the Prince, whose health, never strong, had for some years past shown symptoms of declining. But the Prince Consort, with his fine and manly spirit, made light of his own discomforts; and in his unselfishness had so trained himself steadily to pursue both his work and his enjoyments, that it was difficult even for those nearest to him to see that he was suffering. Perhaps he may have had a presentiment that his earthly life was drawing near its close, and that already in his heart he heard—

"Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field, Approaching through the darkness."

For about this time he said to the Queen, "I do not cling to life; you do, but I set no store by it. If I knew that those I love

were well cared for, I should be quite ready to die to-morrow."

As the dull November days went on, the anxious symptoms increased, though the Prince Consort still attended to the business of the State, and on Sunday the 1st of December, for the last time, he was able to go with his family to the service in the chapel. A few days later the fever, against which he had fought so resolutely, had declared itself unmistakably. It is said that when one of the physicians told His Royal Highness that he would be better in a few days, the Prince replied, "No, I shall not recover; but I am not taken by surprise; I am not afraid. I trust I am prepared." "Prepare to meet thy God" had been the text of the last sermon the Prince had heard at Balmoral; and he had been so much struck by it, that he borrowed the manuscript from the minister, Mr. Stewart, of St. Andrew's, Edinburgh, that he might read it again.

Public duties had still to be carried on, and were regularly fulfilled by our brave Queen, who at this time, as she tells us, seemed "to live in a dreadful dream," but every moment that could be spared was spent beside that sick bed where he lay in whom all her heart's hopes were centred. "Oh, it is an anxious, anxious time," she wrote, "but God will help us through it." In the intervals of clearness, precious words of love overflowed from the depths of that true heart. "Dear little wife, good little

and wandered, but in the middle of the afternoon he knew the Queen, kissed her, said "Good little wife!" and with a gentle sigh laid his head on her shoulder. All the children who were in England had been sent for, and one by one they came to take their last farewell—but that devoted father, who had delighted in them, could give no sign that he knew them. Three gentlemen of the household, each in turn, kissed his hand, overcome with sorrow, but the Prince made no sign. The Queen sat beside him—still and self-controlled.

"To-morrow, and all after-life, for tears; To-day, and all eternity, for love."

Once more the Queen bent over the Prince, whispering, "It is your little wife,"—and by the strength of love, arresting death, he recognized the voice, bowed his head, and kissed her. At eleven o'clock that Saturday night, surrounded by his kneeling children, and with his hand clasped in the hand of his agonized wife, he gently ceased to breathe. His

"Week-day work was done, his rest begun;" and from that hour the crown became "a lonely splendor" to our heart-broken Queen.

The tolling of the great bell of St. Paul's in the cold and dreary midnight, never heard save when "Death has come up into our palaces," roused the sleepers in the great city, with a pang as of a personal bereavement, to weep and pray for the widowed

people. The year 1862 opened with the dire calamity of the Hartley Colliery accident, in which about two hundred men and lads lost their lives. Then, from our gracious Queen, the mother of her people, this message was sent to the bereaved ones:

"Her Majesty's tenderest sympathy is with the poor widows and mothers, and her own misery only makes her feel the more for them. Her Majesty hopes everything will be done, as far as possible, to alleviate their distress, and her Majesty will have the sad satisfaction of assisting in such a measure."

The Queen's example of ready charity, for which she has ever been distinguished, led the way, and £81,000 was subscribed for the sufferers.

When July came, the sadly postponed marriage of the Princess Alice took place very quietly at Osborne. The parting with the daughter who had been as a right hand to the Queen, filling, as far as it lay in her power, her father's vacant place in the routine of public duties as well as of private life, must have been no light trial; and, happy as that marriage proved, the letters of the Princess to the Queen show how fondly her heart was ever clinging to her widowed mother. A year later she thus wrote: "I have known and watched your deep sorrow with an aching heart. Do not think that absence from you can still that pain..... My own sweet mamma, you know I would give my life for you, could I alter what you have to bear. Trust in God ever and constantly. In my life, I feel that to be my stay and my strength, and the feeling increases as the days go on."

The Queen sought a solace in her grief in ministering to those around her; she visited the sick and dying, reading to them from the Word of God. When at Osborne Her Majesty paid a visit to Netley Hospital, and greatly gratified the sick and wounded men there by her sympathy in their suffering and her interest in their welfare; and though "her face bore the marks of a heartfelt and abiding sorrow, her smile was as gracious as ever, and her voice, though low, and very gentle, had all its old sweetness and clearness."

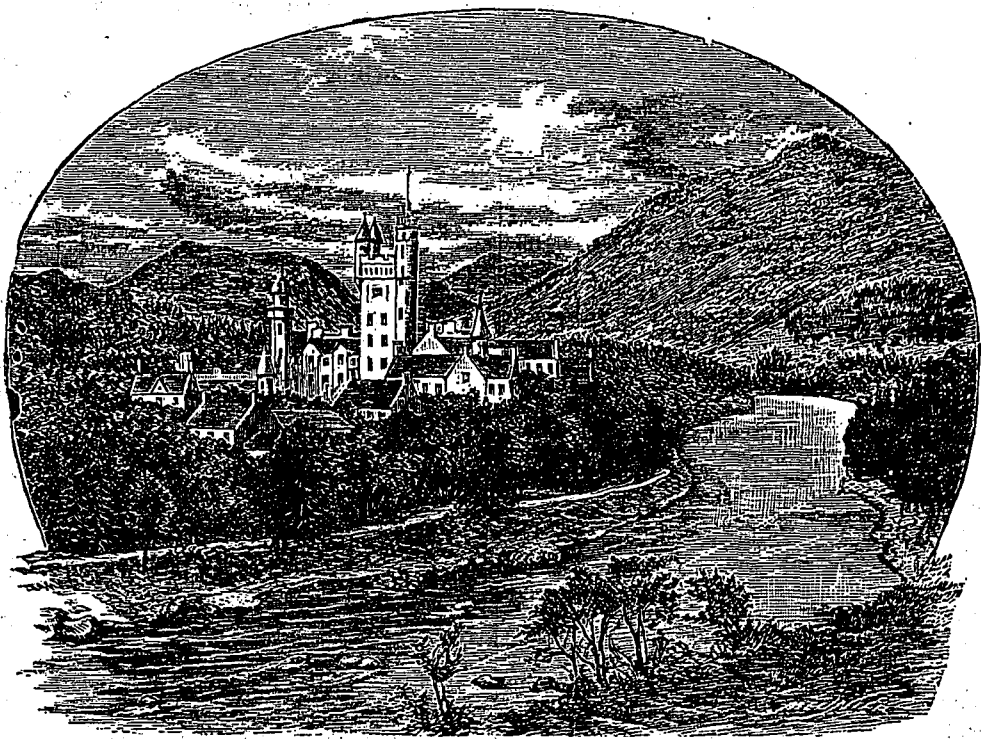
All sorrows find an echo in the stricken heart of our Queen; but that which is akin to the supreme sorrow that has darkened her own life, ever calls forth her deepest sympathy; thus after the death of the great and good President Lincoln, our Queen wrote to his widow, a letter which her son described as "the outgushing of a woman's heartfelt sympathy."

Twenty years later her Majesty's feelings were as tender as in the first freshness of bereavement. When the noble life of President Garfield had been cut short by the dastardly shot of an assassin, the Queen telegraphed to Mrs. Garfield, "Words cannot express the deep sympathy I feel with you in this terrible moment. May God support and comfort you as He alone can." And the message was followed by a letter from the Queen's own hand, expressing in fuller terms her fellow feeling for the widowed heart, in all the phases of its distress.

When Her Majesty was re-visiting the scene of her great happiness, the home at Balmoral, where everything spoke of the Prince Consort, and his skill and his taste; and where the blank of his absence robbed everything of its greatest charm, she found much comfort in the visits of Dr. Norman MacLeod. In her journal the Queen writes: "How I loved to talk to him; to ask his advice; to speak to him of my sorrows, my anxieties!" At one time he was telling of a poor Scottish woman, who had not only lost her husband, but several children also, besides other sorrows; and who, when she was asked how she could bear them all, replied: "When he was ta'en, it made sic a hole in my heart, that a' other sorrows gang lightly through;" and the Queen added, "And so it is; most touchingly and truly expressed; and so it will ever be with me."

(To be Continued.)

EVERY MAN takes care that his neighbor shall not cheat him. But a day comes when he begins to care that he does not cheat his neighbor. Then all goes well. He has changed his market cart into a chariot of the sun.—Emerson.



BALMORAL.

wife," he would say in tenderest tone; and the wasted hand would be laid in hers; or it would fondly caress the anxious face that bent over him, to catch his every look. Very calm was that royal sufferer. We are told that he loved to hear hymns and prayers. At his request a piano was placed in a room that opened into his own, and Princess Alice would play to him the grand sacred music of his Fatherland, or sing his favorite hymns and chorales, carefully hiding her own sorrow, that she might the better minister to him, and showing the deep devotion to her Royal parents which from that time forward made her inexpressibly dear to the English nation.

Until the 11th of December danger was scarcely apprehended by those around the Prince Consort; and the country, therefore, though anxious, had not been alarmed. But on that day the Prince of Wales was summoned from Cambridge, and hope began to grow faint. Early on the morning of the fatal 14th, the Queen on entering the sick-room was struck with the unearthly beauty of the face on which the rising sun was just shining; the eyes seemed gazing on some unseen presence, and the princely husband, who had ever greeted her with gladness, was unconscious of her entrance. Yet even through that last long day, rays of hope, now and again, shot athwart the deepening darkness—but when the royal sufferer arranged his hair and folded his arms, the doctors recognized the signs of preparing for departure. The Prince dozed

Queen. The tidings of sorrow spread rapidly throughout the kingdom; but to many the first knowledge of the calamity came during the morning service, in the solemn pause in prayer, and the omission of the honored name of him for whom thenceforward there could be nought but praise.

Never was there a truer mourning than England's for her noble dead; the tide of sympathy flowed in to the royal chief mourner and her children, from the lowliest as well as from highest in the land. The loss of such a life from amongst them, and from amongst the nation, bowed down all hearts in a common sorrow for him who was

"A Prince indeed Beyond all titles, and a household name, Hereafter thro' all times, Albert the Good."

The funeral was a stately pageant; nevertheless, that which most distinguished it was the unfeigned sorrow on every face. But the mourners' thoughts were not allowed to be earth-bound. The Prince Consort's favorite chorale, sung at his grave, spoke to them as his last message, when his fatherless sons stood with clasped hands and raining tears as the coffin disappeared from their sight.

"I shall not in the grave remain, Since Thou death's bond hast severed, But hope with Thee to rise again, From fear of death delivered."

Sorrow and loss can never narrow noble natures, and our Sovereign Lady, in the depths of the first freshness of her own woe, was ready to enter into the sorrows of her