

*"Great mourning and weeping."*

Esther 4 : 3.

It is with sad hearts that we assemble here to-day. From palace and cottage alike is heard a sob of sorrow. In the stately homes of England, in the bungalows of India, from the far-off island-continent, through the length and breadth of this Dominion, amid the clash of arms in southern Africa rises the voice of lamentation. A hush falls over our busy toil as the tolling bell peals forth its requiem. A whole Empire mourns, and the civilized world mourns with it. The greatest monarch of the greatest realm has answered the last summons. The Victorian era is ended. The Queen is dead !

And the blow comes with a startling suddenness. Though our Sovereign had lived more than four-score years, yet her splendid vitality and her close connection with everything which concerned the welfare of her subjects had almost made us forget that she was mortal. Our earliest memories of public events have been associated with her illustrious name. We have marked the unerring insight which always led her to do the best and wisest thing. We have revered the personal influence which was so quietly exercised and yet so potent throughout her wide domain. It seems impossible to separate the history of the last sixty years from the queenly presence which has left such an impress upon it. And even though, of late, her spirit was crushed by private afflictions, and by the slaughter of her sons in cruel war, we hoped that she would have been spared yet awhile to rule over us. God has willed otherwise. The busy brain has reached the end of earth's labours. The kindly hands are still. The great heart beats no more. We are a bereaved nation. The Queen is dead !

It may be doubted whether any death since the world began has created such universal sorrow. And this is not simply because of her exalted station. It is true that as Empress of Britain's realm she was the most outstanding figure of modern history. Her girdle of rulership encircled the globe. Her subjects were found in every land, and her policy of government, in greater or less degree, affected all the nations of the world. No potentate has ever had such a wide field of responsibility as Queen Victoria ; and now that her sceptre is laid aside, the verdict cannot but be that she has held it with firm, impartial hand ; that her reign has been not only the longest in British annals, but the most beneficent ; and that, amid all the serious and perplexing events of her royal career, she has always shown a fine judgment which made her great in the counsels of the nation, and a ready kindness which will cause millions to remember her as Victoria the Good.