Great Britain and Her Queen

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GREAT BRITAIN AND HER QUEEN

by

ANNE E. KEELING

Author of "General Gordon: Hero and Saint," "The Oakhurst Chronicles," "Andrew Golding," etc.

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[Illustration: Queen Victoria]

[Illustration: Claremont]

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

Claremont
The Coronation of Queen Victoria
Kensington Palace
Duchess of Kent
Elizabeth Fry
Rowland Hill
Father Mathew
George Stephenson
Wheatstone
St. James's Palace
Prince Albert
The Queen in Her Wedding-Dress
Sir Robert Peel
Daniel O'Connell
Richard Cobden
John Bright
Lord John Russell
Thomas Chalmers
John Henry Newmann
Balmoral
Buckingham Palace
Napoleon III
The Crystal Palace, 1851
Lord Ashley
Earl of Derby
Duke of Wellington
Florence Nightingale
Lord Canning
Sir Colin Campbell
Henry Havelock
Sir John Lawrence
Windsor Castle
Prince Frederick William
Princess Royal
Charles Kingsley
Lord Palmerston
Abraham Lincoln and his son
Princess Alice
The Mausoleum
Dr. Norman Macleod
Prince of Wales
Princess of Wales
Osborne House
Sir Robert Napier
Mr. Gladstone
Lord Beaconsfield
Lord Salisbury
General Gordon
Duke of Albany
Duchess of Albany
Sydney Heads
Robert Southey
William Wordsworth
Alfred Tennyson
Robert Browning
Charles Dickens
W. M. Thackeray
Charlotte Bronte
Lord Macaulay

[Illustration: The Coronation of Queen Victoria]

GREAT BRITAIN AND HER QUEEN.

[Illustration: Kensington Palace]

CHAPTER I.

THE GIRL-QUEEN AND HER KINGDOM.

Rather more than one mortal lifetime, as we average life in these later days, has elapsed since that June morning of 1837, when Victoria of England, then a fair young princess of eighteen, was roused from her tranquil sleep in the old palace at Kensington, and bidden to rise and meet the Primate, and his dignified associates the Lord Chamberlain and the royal physician, who "were come on business of state to the Queen"--words of startling import, for they meant that, while the royal maiden lay sleeping, the aged King, whose heiress she was, had passed into the deeper sleep of death. It is already an often-told story how promptly, on receiving that summons, the young Queen rose and came to meet her first homagers, standing before them in hastily assumed wrappings, her hair hanging loosely, her feet in slippers, but in all her hearing such royally firm composure as deeply impressed those heralds of her greatness, who noticed at the same moment that her eyes were full of tears. This little scene is not only charming and touching, it is very significant, suggesting a combination of such qualities as are not always found united: sovereign good sense and readiness, blending with quick, artless feeling that sought no disguise--such feeling as again betrayed itself when on her ensuing proclamation the new Sovereign had to meet her people face to face, and stood before them at her palace window, composed but sad, the tears running unchecked down her fair pale face.

That rare spectacle of simple human emotion, at a time when a selfish or thoughtless spirit would have leaped in exultation, touched the heart of England deeply, and was rightly held of happy omen. The nation's feeling is aptly expressed in the glowing verse of Mrs. Browning, praying Heaven's blessing on the "weeping Queen," and prophesying for her the love, happiness, and honour which have been hers in no stinted measure. "Thou shalt be well beloved," said the poetess; there are very few sovereigns of whom it could be so truly said that they _have_ been well beloved, for not many have so well deserved it. The faith of the singer has been amply justified, as time has made manifest the rarer qualities joyfully divined in those early days in the royal child, the single darling hope of the nation.

Once before in the recent annals of our land had expectations and desires equally ardent centred themselves on one young head. Much of the loyal devotion which had been alienated from the immediate family of George III. had transferred itself to his grandchild, the Princess Charlotte, sole offspring of the unhappy marriage between George, Prince of Wales, and Caroline of Brunswick. The people had watched with vivid interest the young romance of Princess Charlotte's happy marriage, and had bitterly lamented her too early death--an event which had overshadowed all English hearts with forebodings of disaster. Since that dark day a little of the old attachment of England to its sovereigns had revived for the frank-mannered sailor and "patriot king," William IV; but the hopes crushed by the death of the much-regretted Charlotte had renewed themselves with even better warrant for Victoria. She was the child of no ill-omened, miserable marriage, but of a fitting union; her parents had been sundered only by death, not by wretched domestic dissensions. People heard that the mortal malady which deprived her of a father had been brought about by the Duke of Kent's simple delight in his baby

princess, which kept him playing with the child when he should have been changing his wet outdoor garb; and they found something touching and tender in the tragic little circumstance. And everything that could be noticed of the manner in which the bereaved duchess was training up her precious charge spoke well for the mother's wisdom and affection, and for the future of the daughter.

It was indeed a happy day for England when Edward, Duke of Kent, the fourth son of George III, was wedded to Victoria of Saxe-Coburg, the widowed Princess of Leiningen--happy, not only because of the admirable skill with which that lady conducted her illustrious child's education, and because of the pure, upright principles, the frank, noble character, which she transmitted to that child, but because the family connection established through that marriage was to be yet further serviceable to the interests of our realm. Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg was second son of the Duchess of Kent's eldest brother, and thus first cousin of the Princess Victoria--"the Mayflower," as, in fond allusion to the month of her birth, her mother's kinsfolk loved to call her: and it has been made plain that dreams of a possible union between the two young cousins, very nearly of an age, were early cherished by the elders who loved and admired both.

[Illustration: Duchess of Kent. From an Engraving by Messrs. P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., Pall Mall East.]

The Princess's life, however, was sedulously guarded from all disturbing influences. She grew up in healthy simplicity and seclusion; she was not apprised of her nearness to the throne till she was twelve years old; she had been little at Court, little in sight, but had been made familiar with her own land and its history, having received the higher education so essential to her great position; while simple truth and rigid honesty were the very atmosphere of her existence. From such a training much might be hoped; but even those who knew most and hoped most were not quite prepared for the strong individual character and power of self-determination that revealed themselves in the girlish being so suddenly transferred "from the nursery to the throne." It was quickly noticed that the part of Queen and mistress seemed native to her, and that she filled it with not more grace than propriety. "She always strikes me as possessed of singular penetration, firmness, and independence," wrote Dr. Norman Macleod in 1860; acute observers in 1837 took note of the same traits, rarer far in youth than in full maturity, and closely connected with the "reasoning, searching" quality of her mind, "anxious to get at the root and reality of things, and abhorring all shams, whether in word or deed." [Footnote]

[Footnote: "Life of Norman Macleod, D.D." vol. ii.]

It was well for England that its young Sovereign could exemplify virile strength as well as womanly sweetness; for it was indeed a cloudy and dark day when she was called to her post of lonely grandeur and hard responsibility; and to fill that post rightly would have overtasked and overwhelmed a feebler nature. It is true that the peace of Europe, won at Waterloo, was still unbroken. But already, within our borders and without them, there were the signs of coming storm. The condition of Ireland was chronically bad; the condition of England was full of danger; on the Continent a new period of earth-shaking revolution announced itself not doubtfully.

It would be hardly possible to exaggerate the wretched state of the sister isle, where fires of recent hate were still smouldering, and where the poor inhabitants, guilty and guiltless, were daily living on the verge of famine, over which they were soon to be driven. Their ill condition much aggravated by the intemperate habits to which despairing men so easily fall a prey. The expenditure of Ireland on proof spirits alone had in the year 1829 attained the sum of L6,000,000.

In England many agricultural labourers were earning starvation wages, were living on bad and scanty food, and were housed so wretchedly that they might envy the hounds their dry and clean kennels. A dark symptom of their hungry discontent had shown itself in the strange crime of rick-burning, which went on under cloud of night season after season, despite the utmost precautions which the luckless farmers could adopt. The perpetrators were not dimly guessed to be half-famished creatures, taking a mad revenge for their wretchedness by destroying the tantalising stores of grain, too costly for their consumption; the price of wheat in the early years of Her Majesty's reign and for some time previously being very high, and reaching at one moment (1847) the extraordinary figure of a hundred and two shillings per quarter.

There was threatening distress, too, in some parts of the manufacturing districts; in others a tolerably high level of wages indicated prosperity. But even in the more favoured districts there was needless suffering. The hours of work, unrestricted by law, were cruelly long; nor did there exist any restriction as to the employment of operatives of very tender years. "The cry of the children" was rising up to heaven, not from the factory only, but from the underground darkness of the mine, where a system of pitiless infant slavery prevailed, side by side with the employment of women as beasts of burden, "in an atmosphere of filth and profligacy." The condition of too many toilers was rendered more hopeless by the thriftless follies born of ignorance. The educational provision made by the piety of former ages was no longer adequate to the needs of the ever-growing nation; and all the voluntary efforts made by clergy and laity, by Churchmen and Dissenters, did not fill up the deficiency--a fact which had only just begun to meet with State recognition. It was in 1834 that Government first obtained from Parliament the grant of a small sum in aid of education. Under a defective system of poor-relief, recently reformed, an immense mass of idle pauperism had come into being; it still remained to be seen if a new Poor Law could do away with the mischief created by the old one.

Looking at the earliest years of Her Majesty's rule, the first impulse is to exclaim:

"And all this trouble did not pass, but grew."

It seemed as if poverty became ever more direful, and dissatisfaction more importunate. A succession of unfavourable seasons and failing crops produced extraordinary distress; and the distress in its turn was fruitful first of deepened discontent, and then of political disturbances. The working classes had looked for immediate relief from their burdens when the Reform Bill should be carried, and had striven hard to insure its success: it had been carried triumphantly

in 1832, but no perceptible improvement in their lot had yet resulted; and a resentful feeling of disappointment and of being victims of deception now added bitterness to their blind sense of misery and injury, and greatly exasperated the political agitation of the ten stormy years that followed.

No position could well be more trying than that of the inexperienced girl who, in the first bloom of youth, was called to rule the land in this wild transitional period. Her royal courage and gracious tact, her transparent truthfulness, her high sense of duty, and her precocious discretion served her well; but these young excellences could not have produced their full effect had she not found in her first Prime Minister a faithful friend and servant, whose loyal and chivalrous devotion at once conciliated her regard, and who only used the influence thus won to impress on his Sovereign's mind "sound maxims of constitutional government, and truths of every description which it behoved her to learn." The records of the time show plainly that Lord Melbourne, the eccentric head of William IV's last Whig Administration, was not generally credited with either the will or the ability to play so lofty a part. His affectation of a lazy, trifling, indifferent manner, his often-quoted remonstrance to impetuous would-be reformers, "Can't you let it alone?" had earned for him some angry disapproval, and caused him to be regarded as the embodiment of the detested _laissez-faire_ principle. But under his mask of nonchalance he hid some noble qualities, which at this juncture served Queen and country well.

Considered as a frivolous, selfish courtier by too many of the suffering poor and of their friends, he was in truth "acting in all things an affectionate, conscientious, and patriotic part" towards his Sovereign, "endeavouring to make her happy as a woman and popular as a Queen," [Footnote] telling her uncourtly truths with a blunt honesty that did not displease her, and watching over her with a paternal tenderness which she repaid with frank, noble confidence. He was faithful in a great and difficult trust; let his memory have due honour.

[Footnote: C. C. F. Greville: "A Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria."]

Under Melbourne's pilotage the first months of the new reign went by with some serenity, though the political horizon remained threatening enough, and the temper of the nation appeared sullen. "The people of England seem inclined to hurrah no more," wrote Greville of one of the Queen's earliest public appearances, when "not a hat was raised nor a voice heard" among the coldly curious crowd of spectators. But the splendid show of her coronation a half-year later awakened great enthusiasm--enthusiasm most natural and inevitable. It was youth and grace and goodness, all the freshness and the infinite promise of spring, that wore the crimson and the ermine and the gold, that sat enthroned amid the ancient glories of the Abbey to receive the homage of all that was venerable and all that was great in a mighty kingdom, and that bowed in meek devotion to receive the solemn consecrating blessing of the Primate, according to the holy custom followed in England for a thousand years, with little or no variation since the time when Dunstan framed the Order of Coronation, closely following the model of the Communion Service. Some other features special to _this_ coronation heightened the national delight in it. Its arrangements evidently had for their chief aim to interest and to

gratify the people. Instead of the banquet in Westminster Hall, which could have been seen only by the privileged and the wealthy, a grand procession through London was arranged, including all the foreign ambassadors, and proceeding from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey by a route two or three miles in length, so that the largest possible number of spectators might enjoy the magnificent pageant. And the overflowing multitudes whose dense masses lined the whole long way, and in whose tumultuous cheering pealing bells and sounding trumpets and thundering cannon were almost unheard as the young Queen passed through the shouting ranks, formed themselves the most impressive spectacle to the half-hostile foreign witnesses, who owned that the sight of these rejoicing thousands of freemen was grand indeed, and impossible save in that England which, then as now, was not greatly loved by its rivals. An element which appealed powerfully to the national pride and the national generosity was supplied by the presence of the Duke of Wellington and of Marshal Soult, his old antagonist, who appeared as French ambassador. Soult, as he advanced with the air of a veteran warrior, was followed by murmurs of admiring applause, which swelled into more than murmurs for the hero of Waterloo bending in homage to his Sovereign. A touch of sweet humanity was added to the imposing scene within the Abbey through what might have been a painful accident. Lord Rolle, a peer between seventy and eighty years of age, stumbling and falling as he climbed the steps of the throne, the Queen impulsively moved as if to aid him; and when the old man, undismayed, persisted in carrying out his act of homage, she asked quickly, "May I not get up and meet him?" and descended one or two steps to save him the ascent. The ready natural kindliness of the royal action awoke ecstatic applause, which could hardly have been heartier had the applauders known how true a type that act supplied of Her Majesty's future conduct. She has never feared to peril her dignity by descending a step or two from her throne, when "sweet mercy, nobility's true badge," has seemed to require such a descent. And her queenly dignity has never been thereby lessened. "She never ceases to be a Queen," says Greville _a propos_ of this scene, "and is always the most charming, cheerful, obliging, unaffected Queen in the world."

[Illustration: Elizabeth Fry]

That "the people" were more considered in the arrangements for this coronation than they had been on any previous occasion of the sort was a circumstance quite in harmony with certain other signs of the times. "The night is darkest before the dawn," and amid all the gloom which enshrouded the land there could be discerned the stir and movement that herald the coming of the day. Men's minds were turning more and more to the healing of the world's wounds. Already one great humane enterprise had been carried through in the emancipation of the slaves in British Colonies; already the vast work of prison reform had been well begun, through the saintly Elizabeth Fry, whose life of faithful service ended ere the Queen had reigned eight years. The very year of Her Majesty's accession was signalised by two noteworthy endeavours to put away wrong. We will turn first to that which _seems_ the least immediately philanthropic, although the injustice which it remedied was trivial in appearance only, since in its everyday triviality it weighed most heavily on the most numerous class--that of the humble and the poor.

[Illustration: Rowland Hill]

How would the Englishman of to-day endure the former exactions of the Post Office? The family letters of sixty years ago, written on the largest sheets purchasable, crossed and crammed to the point of illegibility, filled with the news of many and many a week, still witness of the time when "a letter from London to Brighton cost eightpence, to Aberdeen one and threepence-halfpenny, to Belfast one and fourpence"; when, "if the letter were written on more than one sheet, it came under the operation of a higher scale of charges," and when the privilege of franking letters, enjoyed and very largely exercised by members of Parliament and members of the Government, had the peculiar effect of throwing the cost of the mail service exactly on that part of the community which was least able to bear it. The result of the injustice was as demoralising as might have been expected. The poorer people who desired to have tidings of distant friend or relative were driven by the prohibitory rates of postage into all sorts of curious, not quite honest devices, to gratify their natural desire without being too heavily taxed for it. A brother and sister, for instance, unable to afford themselves the costly luxury of regular correspondence, would obtain assurance of each other's well-being by transmission through the post at stated intervals of blank papers duly sealed and addressed: the arrival of the postman with a missive of this kind announced to the recipient that all was well with the sender, so the unpaid "letter" was cheerfully left on the messenger's hands. Such an incident, coming under the notice of Mr. Rowland Hill, impressed him with a sense of hardship and wrong in the system that bore these fruits; and he set himself with strenuous patience to remedy the wrong and the hardship. His scheme of reform was worked out and laid before the public early in 1837; in the third year of Her Majesty's reign it was first adopted in its entirety, with what immense profit to the Government we may partly see when we contrast the seventy-six or seventy-seven millions of _paid_ letters delivered in the United Kingdom during the last year of the heavy postage with the number exceeding a thousand millions, and still increasing--delivered yearly during the last decade; while the population has not doubled. That the Queen's own letters carried postage under the new regime was a fact almost us highly appreciated as Her Majesty's voluntary offer at a later date to bear her due share of the income tax.

It is well to notice how later Postmasters General, successors of Rowland Hill in that important office, have striven further to benefit their countrymen. In particular, Henry Fawcett's earnest efforts to encourage and aid habits of thrift are worthy of remembrance.

Again, it is during the first year of Her Majesty's reign that we find Father Mathew, the Irish Capuchin friar, initiating his vast crusade against intemperance, and by the charm of his persuasive eloquence and unselfish enthusiasm inducing thousands upon thousands to forswear the drink-poison that was destroying them. In two years he succeeded in enrolling two million five hundred thousand persons on the side of sobriety. The permanence of the good Father's immediate work was impaired by the superstitions which his poor followers associated with it, much against his desire. Not only were the medals which he gave as badges to his vowed abstainers regarded as infallible talismans from the hand of a saint, but the giver was credited with miraculous powers such as only a Divine Being could exercise, and which he disclaimed in vain--extravagances too likely to discredit his enterprise with more soberly judging persons than

the imaginative Celts who were his earliest converts. But, notwithstanding every drawback, his action was most important, and deserves grateful memory. We may see in it the inception of that great movement whose indirect influence in reforming social habits and restraining excess had at least equalled its direct power for good on its pledged adherents. Though it is still unhappily true that drunkenness slays its tens of thousands among us, and largely helps to people our workhouses, our madhouses, and our gaols, yet the fiend walks not now, as it used to do, in unfettered freedom. It is no longer a fashionable vice, excused and half approved as the natural expression of joviality and good-fellowship; peers and commoners of every degree no longer join daily in the "heavy-headed revel" whose deep-dyed stain seems to have soaked through every page of our last-century annals. And it would appear as though the vice were not only held from increasing, but were actually on the decrease. The statistics of the last decade show that the consumption of alcohol is diminishing, and that of true food-stuffs proportionally rising.

[Illustration: Father Mathew]

There were other enterprises now set on foot, by no means directly philanthropic in their aim, which contemplated utility more than virtue or justice--enterprises whose vast effects are yet unexhausted, and which have so modified the conditions of human existence as to make the new reign virtually a new epoch. As to the real benefit of these immense changes, opinion is somewhat divided; but the majority would doubtless vote in their favour. The first railway in England, that between Liverpool and Manchester, had been opened in 1830, the day of its opening being made darkly memorable by the accident fatal to Mr. Huskisson, as though the new era must be inaugurated by a sacrifice. Three years later there was but this one railway in England, and one, seven miles long, in Scotland. But in 1837 the Liverpool and Birmingham line was opened; in 1838 the London and Birmingham and the Liverpool and Preston lines, and an Act was passed for transmitting the mails by rail; in 1839 there was the opening of the London and Croydon line. The ball was set fairly rolling, and the supersession of ancient modes of communication was a question of time merely. The advance of the new system was much accelerated at the outset by the fact that railway enterprise became the favourite field for speculation, men being attracted by the novelty and tempted by exaggerated prospects of profit; and the mania was followed, like other manias, with results largely disastrous to the speculators and to commerce. But through years of good fortune and of bad fortune the iron network has continued to spread itself, until all the land lies embraced in its ramifications; and it is spreading still, like some strange organism the one condition of whose life is reproduction, knitting the greatest centres of commerce with the loneliest and remotest villages that were wont to lie far out of the travelled ways of men, and bringing _Ultima Thule_ into touch with London.

[Illustration: George Stephenson]

Meanwhile the steam service by sea has advanced almost with that by land. In 1838 three steamships crossed the Atlantic between this country and New York, the _Great Western_, sailing from Bristol, and _Sirius_, from Cork, distinguished themselves by the short passages they made,--of fifteen days in the first case, and seventeen days in the second,--and by their using steam power _alone_ to effect the

transit, an experiment that had not been risked before. It was now proved feasible, and in a year or two there was set on foot that regular steam communication between the New World and the Old, which ever since has continued to draw them into always closer connection, as the steamers, like swift-darting shuttles, weave their multiplying magic lines across the liquid plain between.

The telegraph wires that run beside road and rail, doing the office of nerves in transmitting intelligence with thrilling quickness from the extremities to the head and from the head to the extremities of our State, are now so familiar an object, and their operations, such mere matters of every day, that we do not often recall how utterly unfamiliar they were sixty years ago, when Wheatstone and Cooke on this side the Atlantic, and Morse on the other, were devising their methods for giving signals and sounding alarms in distant places by means of electric currents transmitted through metallic circuits. Submarine telegraphy lay undreamed of in the future, land telegraphy was but just gaining hearing as a practicable improvement, when the crown was set on Her Majesty's head amid all that pomp and ceremony at Westminster. A modern English imagination is quite unequal to the task of realising the manifold hindrances that beset human intercourse at that day, when a journey by coach between places as important and as little remote from each other as Leeds and Newcastle occupied sixteen mortal hours, with changes of horses and stoppages for meals on the road, and when letters, unless forwarded by an "express" messenger at heavy cost, tarried longer on the way than even did passengers; while some prudent dwellers in the country deemed it well to set their affairs in order and make their wills before embarking on the untried perils of a journey up to town. These days are well within the memory of many yet living; but if the newer generations that have arisen during the present reign would understand what it is to be hampered in their movements and their correspondence as were their fathers, they must seek the remoter and more savage quarters of Europe, the less travelled portions of America or of half-explored Australia; they must plunge into Asian or African wilds, untouched by civilisation, where as yet there runs not the iron horse, worker of greater marvels than the wizard steeds of fairy fable, that could, transport a single favoured rider over wide distances in little time. The subjugated, serviceable nature-power Steam, with its fellow-servant the tamed and tutored Lightning, has wonderfully contracted distance during these fifty years, making the earth, once so vast to human imagination, appear as a globe shrunken to a tenth of its ancient size, and bringing nations divided by half the surface of that globe almost within sound of each other's speech.

[Illustration: Wheatstone.]

That there is damage as well as profit in all these increased facilities of intercourse must be apparent, since there is evil as well as good in the human world, and increased freedom of communication implies freer communication of the evil as of the good. But we may well hope that the cause of true upward progress will be most served by the vast inevitable changes which, as they draw all peoples nearer together, must deepen and strengthen the sense of human brotherhood, and, as they bring the deeds of all within the knowledge of all, must consume by an intolerable blaze of light the once secret iniquities and oppressions abhorrent to the universal conscience of mankind. The public conscience in these realms at least is better informed and more sensitive than it was in the year of

William IV's death and of Victoria's accession.

CHAPTER II.

STORM AND SUNSHINE.

[Illustration: St. James's Palace.]

The beneficent changes we have briefly described were but just inaugurated, and their possible power for good was as yet hardly divined, when the young Queen entered into that marriage which we may well deem the happiest action of her life, and the most fruitful of good to her people, looking to the extraordinary character of the husband of her choice, and to the unobtrusive but always advantageous influence which his great and wise spirit exercised on our national life.

The marriage had been anxiously desired, and the way for it judiciously prepared, but it was in no sense forced on either of the contracting parties by their elders who so desired it. Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg, second son of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, the Queen's maternal uncle, was nearly of an age with his royal cousin; he had already, young as he was, given evidence of a rare superiority of nature; he had been excellently trained; and there is no doubt that Leopold, king of the Belgians, his uncle, and the Queen's, did most earnestly desire to see the young heiress of the British throne, for whom he had a peculiar tenderness, united to the one person whose position and whose character combined to point him out as the fit partner for her high and difficult destinies. What tact, what patience, and what power of self-suppression the Queen of England's husband would need to exercise, no one could better judge than Leopold, the widowed husband of Princess Charlotte; no one could more fully have exemplified these qualities than the prince in whom Leopold's penetration divined them.

The cousins had already met, in 1836, when their mutual attraction had been sufficiently strong; and in 1839, when Prince Albert, with his elder brother Ernest, was again visiting England, the impression already produced became ineffaceably deep. The Queen, whom her great rank compelled to take the initiative, was not very long in making up her mind when and how to act. Her favoured suitor himself, writing to a dear relative, relates how she performed the trying task, inviting him to render her intensely happy by making "the _sacrifice_ of sharing her life with her, for she said she looked on it as a sacrifice. The joyous openness with which she told me this enchanted me, and I was quite carried away by it." This was on October 15th; nearly six weeks after, on November 23rd, she made to her assembled Privy Council the formal declaration of her intended marriage. There is something particularly touching in even the driest description of this scene; the betrothed bride wearing a simple morning dress, having on her arm a bracelet containing Prince Albert's portrait, which helped to give her courage; her voice, as she read the declaration clear, sweet, and penetrating as ever, but her hands trembling so excessively that it was surprising she could read the paper she held. It was a trying task, but not so difficult as that which had devolved on her a short time before, when, in virtue of her sovereign rank, she had first to speak the words of fate that bound

her to her suitor.

[Illustration: Prince Albert.]

Endowed with every charm of person, mind, and manner that can win and keep affection, Prince Albert was able, in marrying the Queen, who loved him and whom he loved, to secure for her a happiness rare in any rank, rarest of all on the cold heights of royalty. This was not all; he was the worthy partner of her greatness. Himself highly cultivated in every sense, he watched with keenest interest over the advance of all cultivation in the land of his adoption, and identified himself with every movement to improve its condition. His was the soul of a statesman--wide, lofty, far-seeing, patient; surveying all great things, disdaining no small things, but with tireless industry pursuing after all necessary knowledge. Add to these intellectual excellences the moral graces of ideal purity of life, chivalrous faithfulness of heart, magnanimous self-suppression, and fervent piety, and we have a slight outline of a character which, in the order of Providence, acted very strongly and with a still living force on the destinies of nineteenth-century England. The Queen had good reasons for the feeling of "confidence and comfort" that shone in the glance she turned on her bridegroom as they walked away, man and wife at last, from the altar of the Chapel Royal, on February 10th, 1840. The union she then entered into immeasurably enhanced her popularity, and strengthened her position as surely as it expanded her nature. Not many years elapsed before Sir Robert Peel could tell her that, in spite of the inroads of democracy, the monarchy had never been safer, nor had any sovereign been so beloved, because "the Queen's domestic life was so happy, and its example so good." Only the Searcher of hearts knoweth how great has been the holy power of a pure, fair, and noble example constantly shining in the high places of the land.

[Illustration: The Queen in her Wedding-Dress. _After the Picture by_ Drummond.]

It was hinted by the would-be wise, in the early days of Her Majesty's married life, that it would be idle to look for the royally maternal feeling of an Elizabeth towards her people in a wedded constitutional sovereign. The judgment was a mistake. The formal limitations of our Queen's prerogative, sedulously as she has respected them, have never destroyed her sense of responsibility; wifehood and motherhood have not contracted her sympathies, but have deepened and widened them. The very sorrows of her domestic life have knit her in fellowship with other mourners. No great calamity can befall her humblest subjects, and she hear of it, but there comes the answering flash of tender pity. She is more truly the mother of her people, having walked on a level with them, and with "Love, who is of the valley," than if she had chosen to dwell alone and aloof.

[Illustration: Sir Robert Peel.]

For some years after her marriage the Queen's private life shows like a little isle of brightness in the midst of a stormy sea. Within and without our borders there was small prospect of settled peace at the very time of that marriage. We have said that Lord Melbourne was still Premier; but he and his Ministry had resigned office in the previous May, and had only come back to it in consequence of a curious misunderstanding known as "the Bedchamber difficulty." Sir

Robert Peel, who was summoned to form a Ministry on Melbourne's defeat and resignation, had asked from Her Majesty the dismissal of two ladies of her household, the wives of prominent members of the departing Whig Government; but his request conveyed to her mind the sense that he designed to deprive her of all her actual attendants, and against this imagined proposal she set herself energetically. "She could not consent to a course which she conceived to be contrary to usage, and which was repugnant to her feelings." Peel on his part remained firm in his opinion as to the real necessity for the change which he had advocated. From the deadlock produced by mere misunderstanding there seemed at the time only one way of escaping; the defeated Whig Government returned to office. But Ministers who resumed power only because, "as gentlemen," they felt bound to do so, had little chance of retaining it. In September 1841, Lord Melbourne was superseded in the premiership by Sir Robert Peel, and then gave a final proof how single-minded was his loyal devotion by advising the new Prime Minister as to the tone and style likely to commend him to their royal mistress--a tone of clear straightforwardness. "The Queen," said Melbourne--who knew of what he was speaking, if any statesman then did--"is not conceited; she is aware there are many things she cannot understand, and likes them explained to her elementarily, not at length and in detail, but shortly and clearly." The counsel was given and was accepted with equal good feeling, such as was honourable to all concerned; and the Sovereign learned, as years went on, to repose a singular confidence in the Minister with whom her first relations had been so unpropitious, but whose real honesty, ability, and loyalty soon approved themselves to her clear perceptions, which no prejudice has long been able to obscure.

We are told that in later years Her Majesty referred to the disagreeable incident we have just related as one that could not have occurred, if she had had beside her Prince Albert "to talk to and employ in explaining matters," while she refused the suggestion that her impulsive resistance had been advised by any one about her. "It was entirely my own foolishness," [Footnote] she is said to have added--words breathing that perfect simplicity of candour which has always been one of her most strongly marked characteristics.

[Footnote: "Greville Memoirs," Third Part, vol. i.]

Though the matter caused a great sensation at the time, and gave rise to some dismal prophesyings, it was of no permanent importance, and is chiefly noted here because it throws a strong light on Her Majesty's need of such an ever-present aid as she had now secured in the husband wise beyond his years, who well understood his constitutional position, and was resolute to keep within it, avoiding entanglement with any party, and fulfilling with equal impartiality and ability the duties of private secretary to his Sovereign-wife.

The Melbourne Ministry had had to contend with difficulties sufficiently serious, and of these the grimmest and greatest remained still unsettled. At the outset of the reign a rebellion in Canada had required strong repression; and we had taken the first step on a bad road by entering into those disputes as to our right to force the opium traffic on China, which soon involved us in a disastrously successful war with that country. On the other hand, our Indian Government had begun an un-called-for interference with the affairs of Afghanistan, which, successful at first, resulted in a series of humiliating reverses to our arms, culminating in one of the most

terrible disasters that have ever befallen a British force--the wholesale massacre of General Elphinstone's defeated and retreating army on its passage through the terrible mountain gorge known as the Pass of Koord Cabul. It was on January 13th, 1842, that the single survivor of this massacre appeared, a half-fainting man, drooping over the neck of his wearied pony, before the fort of Jellalabad, which General Sale still held for the English. He only was "escaped alone" to tell the hideous tale. The ill-advised and ill-managed enterprise which thus terminated had extended over more than three years, had cost us many noble lives, in particular that of the much-lamented Alexander Burnes, had condemned many English women and children to a long and cruel captivity among the savage foe, and had absolutely failed as to the object for which it was undertaken--the instalment of Shah Soojah, a mere British tool, as ruler of Afghanistan, in place of the chief desired by the Afghan people, Dost Mahomed. When the disasters to our arms had been retrieved, as retrieved they were with exemplary promptness, and when the surviving prisoners were redeemed from their hard captivity, it was deemed sound policy for us to attempt no longer to "force a sovereign on a reluctant people," and to remain content with that limit which "nature appears to have assigned" to our Indian empire on its north-western border. Later adventures in the same field have not resulted so happily as to prove that these views were incorrect. Our prestige was seriously damaged in Hindostan by this first Afghan war, and was only partially re-established in the campaign against the Sikhs several years later, despite the dramatic grandeur of that "piece of Indian history" which resulted in our annexation of the Punjaub in 1846--a solid advantage balanced by the unpleasant fact that English soldiers had been proved not invincible by natives.

It will thus appear that there was not too much that was glorious or encouraging in our external affairs in these early years; but the internal condition of the country was never less reassuring. The general discontent of the English lower orders was taking shape as Chartism--a movement which could not have arisen but for the fierce suspicion with which the working classes had learnt to regard those who seemed their superiors in wealth, in rank, or in political power, and which the higher orders retaliated in dislike and distrust of the labouring population, whom they considered as seditious enemies of order and property. The demon of class hatred was never more alive and busy than in the decade which terminated in 1848.

"The Charter," which was the watchword of hope to so many, and the very war-note of discord to many more, comprised six points, of which some at least were sufficiently absurd, while others have virtually passed into law, quietly and naturally, in due course of time; and if the universal Age of Gold which ignorant Chartists looked for has not ensued, at least the anarchy and ruin which their opponents associated with the dreaded scheme are equally non-existent. So fast has the time moved that there is now a little difficulty in understanding the passionate hopes with which the Charter was associated on the one side, and the panic which it inspired on the other; and there is much to move wondering compassion in the profound ignorance which those hopes betrayed, and the not inferior misery amid which they were cherished. Few persons are now so credulous as to expect that annual Parliaments or stipendiary members would insure the universal reign of peace and justice; the people have already found that vote by ballot and suffrage all but universal have neither equalised wealth nor abrogated greed and iniquity; and though there

be some dreamers in our midst to-day who look for wonderful transformations of society to follow on possible reforms, there is not even in these dreamy schemes the same amazing disproportion of means to be employed and end to be attained as characterised the Chartist delusion.

[Illustration: Daniel O'Connell.]

In Ireland men were reposing unbounded faith in another sort of political panacea for every personal and social evil--the Repeal of the Union with England, advocated by Daniel O'Connell, with all the power of his passionate Celtic eloquence, and supported by all his extraordinary personal influence. Apparently he hoped to carry this agitation to the same triumphant issue as that for Catholic emancipation, in which he had taken a conspicuous part; but the new movement did not, like the old one, appeal immediately and plausibly to the English sense of fair play and natural justice. A competent and not unfriendly observer has remarked that O'Connell's "theory and policy were that Ireland was to be saved by a dictatorship entrusted to himself." Whether any salvation for the unhappy land did lie in such a dictatorship was a point on which opinion might well be divided. English opinion was massively hostile to it; but for years all the political enthusiasm of Ireland centred in O'Connell and the cause he upheld. The country might be on the brink of ruin and starvation, but the peril seemed forgotten while the dream lasted. The agitator was wont to refer to the Queen in terms of extravagant loyalty, and it would seem that the feeling was largely shared by his followers. However futile and vainglorious his scheme and methods may appear, we must not deny to him a distinction, rare indeed among Irish agitators, of having steadily disclaimed violence and advocated orderly and peaceable proceedings. He thought his cause would be injured, and not advanced, by such outrages as before and since his day have too often disgraced party warfare in Ireland. His favourite maxim was that "the man who commits a crime gives strength to the enemy." This opinion was not heartily endorsed by all his followers. When it became clear that his dislike of physical force was real, when he did not defy the Government, at last stirred into hostile action by the demonstrations he organised, there was an end of his power over the fiercer spirits whom he had roused against the rule of "the Saxon"--luckless phrase with which he had enriched the Anglo-Irish controversy, and misleading as luckless. O'Connell died, a broken and disappointed man, on his way to Rome in 1847; but the spirit he had raised and could not rule did not die with him, and the younger, more turbulent leaders, who had outbid him for popular approval, continued their anti-English warfare with growing zeal until the year of fate 1848.

Even the Principality of Wales had its own peculiar form of agitation, sometimes accompanied by outrage, during these wild opening years. The farmers and labourers in Wales were unprosperous and poor, and in the season of their adversity they found turnpikes and tolls multiplying on their public roads. They resented what appeared a cruel imposition with wrathful impatience, and ere long gave expression to their anger in wild deeds. A text of Scripture suggested to them a fantastic form of riot. They found that it was said of old to Rebecca, "Let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them," and ere long "Rebecca and her children," men masking in women's clothes, made fierce war by night on the "gates" they detested, destroying the turnpikes and driving out their keepers.