Queen's first grandchild, a boy, was born when his mother was only eighteen, and his grandmother thirty-nine. And the next domestic event of deep interest was the betrothal of Princess Alice to Prince Louis of Hesse, on November 30th, 1860.

1861 was a disastrous year to our beloved monarch—a year of sorrow and bereavement.

On March 16th the Queen lost her mother, the Duchess of Kent.

"She is gone," she writes, to her uncle, King Leopold, during those first hours of bereavement; "that precious, dearly beloved, tender mother, whom I never parted with but for a few months, without whom I cannot imagine life, has been taken from us. . . . I held her dear hand in mine to the last, which I am truly thankful for. But the watching that precious life going out was fearful! Alas! she never knew me; but she was spared the pang of parting. . . . I feel so truly *verwaist* (orphaned)." Throughout these sad days of bereavement the Prince was her truest comforter. "He was so tender and kind," she writes in her diary, "so pained to have to ask me distressing questions, but spared me so much. Everything done so quietly and feelingly." And indeed that watchful care and sympathy never failed her while his life lasted. In August Her Majesty and the Prince paid another visit to Ireland, accompanied by Prince Arthur and the Princesses Alice and Helena. They then proceeded to their beloved Highland home, where they spent a few weeks of retirement; the last they were to spend there together, for the shadow of death was soon to draw over that happy married life.

For the last ten years the health of the Prince Consort had been unsatisfactory. The severe mental strain entailed by incessant work, and the sense of his responsibility as private adviser to Her Majesty, had weakened his constitution, and with all the goodwill of those who served and helped

him so faithfully, they could not prevent "a pressure which constantly compelled him to do in one day what would have been more than ample work for two." Well may he speak, in one of his letters to the Crown Princess, of "the treadmill of never-ending business."

"It was evident," as Sir Theodore Martin tells us, "that the Prince Consort was in a state of health when any little casualty, whether of exposure to the weather or to any noxious agent of any kind, could scarcely fail to affect him seriously." The typhoid fever, under which he eventually sank, was undoubtedly germinated about November 22nd, when he went to Sandhurst to inspect the building for the new Staff College and Royal Military Academy. It was a day of incessant rain, "*entsetzlicher Regen*" ("terrific rain") as he calls it; and there is no doubt the fatigue and exposure produced injurious results. We are told in the "Prince Consort's Life," that he had no strong yearning for life, "and that he contemplated the prospect of death with an equanimity by no means common in men of his years." Not long before his fatal illness, in speaking to the Queen, he said: "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." And in the same conversation he adds: "I am sure if I had a severe illness I should give up at once. I should not struggle for life; I have no tenacity of life." Sadly prophetical words these proved; but they were said without sadness—his ripe and chastened spirit was ready to follow the Divine will, either for life or death. It is distressing to follow the details of that sad illness, gleaned from the pages of the Queen's Diary,—to read of discomfort and restlessness, broken snatches of sleep, prostration and suffering, unutterable feelings of wretchedness and depression. Such sad entries as this occur on December 5th. "He did not smile, or take much notice of me, but

complained of his wretched condition, and asked what it could be and how long this state of things might last. . . . His manner all along was so unlike himself, and he had sometimes such a strange, wild look." By December 6th the physicians, Dr. Jenner and Sir James Clark, had no doubt of the nature of the illness, that it was gastric or low fever, and they broke the intelligence to the Queen. "I seem to live in a dreadful dream," is the entry of December 7th. "Later in the day my angel lay in bed, and I sat by him watching. The tears fell fast as I thought of the days of anxiety, even if not of alarm, which were in store for us; of the utter shipwreck of new plans, and of the dreadful loss this long illness would be publicly as well as privately; and then, when I had seen Sir James and Dr. Jenner, I talked over what could have caused this illness. Great worry and far too hard work for long. That must be stopped." The Prince's medical advisers had strongly urged their patient to remain in bed; he had resisted their entreaties for some time; when at last their counsel prevailed it was too late. The shadows were deepening, and already the veiled figure of the Dark Angel was on the threshold! By December 12th it was evident the fever and the shortness of breath increased, there was also a probability of congestion of the lungs; and by the 13th Dr. Jenner was obliged to inform the Queen that the illness was extremely serious. All through this trying time of anxiety and suffering the Princess Alice was the greatest comfort to her parents.

The sufferer had been removed into the Blue Room, a fine large cheerful room; strange to say it was the very apartment where William IV. and George IV. had died. A letter written by one of the household gives a touching account of that Sunday:—

"The last Sunday the Prince spent on earth was a very blessed one for the Princess to look back upon. He was

very ill and weak, and she spent the afternoon alone with him while the others were at church. He begged to have his sofa drawn to the window, that he might see the sky and the clouds sailing past. He then asked her to play to him, and she went through several of his favourite hymns and chorales ('Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' amongst them). After she had played some time she looked back and saw him lying back, his hands folded as if in prayer, and his eyes shut. He lay so long without moving that she thought he had fallen asleep. Presently he looked up and smiled. 'Were you asleep, dear Papa?' 'Oh no,' he answered; 'only I have such sweet thoughts.'"

During his illness his hands were often folded in prayer; and when he could not speak, his serene face showed that the "happy thoughts" were with him still. "... Of the devotion and strength of mind shown by the Princess Alice all through these trying scenes it is impossible to speak too highly."

Dr. Watson and Sir Henry Holland had been called in, but though there had been a decided rally, they were all very anxious; and on Friday the 13th, the Prince's condition was regarded as extremely critical.

The Queen had been constantly with him, and he had shown "obvious reluctance to being left by Her Majesty even for the short intervals when her attendance was required elsewhere." Even on the fatal Saturday, the 14th, Sir Theodore Martin tells us, Mr. Brown, of Windsor, who was thoroughly acquainted with the Prince's constitution, informed the Queen "that he thought the Prince was better, and there was ground to hope that the crisis was over."

"I went over at seven," Her Majesty writes, "as I usually did. It was a bright morning, the sun just rising and shining brightly. The room had the sad look of night watching, the candles burnt down to their sockets

the doctors looking anxious. I went in, and never can I forget how beautiful my darling looked, lying there with his face lit up by the rising sun, his eyes unusually bright, gazing as it were on unseen objects and not taking notice of me.

"The hours wore on in agonising alternations of hope and fears."

The Prince of Wales, who had been summoned from Maddingly, had arrived at three in the morning. At twelve the Queen went out on the terrace with Princess Alice for a breath of air; but a military band was playing and she burst into tears and hurried back. The doctors had not yet given up hope; the breathing was the alarming thing, it was so rapid; and also, in the Queen's words, "there was a dusky hue about his face and hands which I knew was not good."

We must quote from Sir Theodore Martin's sad account. "The Queen's distress was terrible; she only left the Prince's room for the one adjoining. Still the doctors continued to comfort her with hope, but they could not blind her to the signs that this precious life, this most precious of lives to her, was ebbing away."

"About half-past five," Her Majesty writes, "I went in and sat beside his bed, which had been wheeled into the middle of the room. 'Gutes Frauchen,' he said, and kissed me."

Later on, when his children and attendants had each kissed his hand, the Queen again bent over him and whispered "Es ist kleines Frauchen," ('Tis your own little wife), and he bowed his head and kissed her.

As the evening advanced a rapid change came on. The Queen, who had retired to give vent to her grief, was summoned from the adjoining room; she took his hand "which was already cold, though the breathing was gentle," and knelt down beside him. As the Castle clock chimed

the third quarter after ten, two or three long breaths were drawn, and the weary warrior, the worn out worker, was at rest. One of the noblest souls that had ever blessed this world had entered into rest.

Well and fitly has our glorious Poet Laureate written—

> "Dear to thy land and ours, a Prince indeed,
> Beyond all titles, and a household name
> Hereafter, thro' all times, Albert the Good."

"Their works do follow them." Truly we may say of our Great Prince that his beloved name is graven indelibly on the hearts and memories of all English men and English women.

WIDOWHOOD

CHAPTER IV

A ROYAL MOURNER

"Break not, oh woman's heart, but still endure;
Break not, for thou art royal, but endure
Remembering all the beauty of that star
Which shone so close beside Thee, that ye made
One light together, but has past, and leaves
The crown a lonely splendour."

LORD TENNYSON.

THE writer of this sketch well remembers that melancholy Sunday, December 15th, when the omission of the Prince Consort's name from the Litany informed the congregation that their revered monarch was a widow. A thrill ran through the church at that solemn and ominous pause; and there were aching hearts and wet eyes as many a silent prayer was breathed for that beloved lady. "God bless and comfort her broken heart." "God help our Queen." "That it may please Thee to defend, and provide for, the fatherless children and widows, and all that are desolate and oppressed." How earnest and united that heartfelt response, "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord " !

The great bell of St. Paul's tolled at midnight, and early the next morning the mournful news was flashed by telegraph

to all parts of the empire. The young Prince Leopold was at Cannes, and in great grief at the death of his governor, General Bowater, who had just died; and the child's anguish at hearing of this fresh sorrow was heart-rending. "My mother will bring him back again," he kept sobbing out. "Oh! I want my mother."

Barnett Smith, in his interesting "Life of the Queen," tells us that there was great anxiety at Windsor for the Queen and Princess Alice.

The beloved friend and attendant of the Duchess of Kent, Lady Augusta Bruce (afterwards wife of Dean Stanley), was summoned to Windsor; and that other dear friend of the Queen, the Duchess of Sutherland, herself lately widowed, had also been asked to stay with her Royal mistress. We will quote the entire passage: "For three days they (the Queen and Princess Alice) suffered terribly, and Her Majesty's weakness was so great that her pulse could hardly be felt. The Princess afterwards said that she wondered how her mother and herself had lived through these first bitter days. The Queen "spoke about God's knowing best, but showed herself broken-hearted." At length the country was relieved, on learning that exhausted nature had somewhat recovered itself, and that the Queen had slept. Her Majesty was again and again urged to leave Windsor before the funeral; but she wept bitterly, and said her subjects were never advised to leave their homes or the remains of those lost to them. It was only when the safety of her children was pleaded as a means of giving them immunity from the fever, that she was prevailed upon to leave Windsor and repair to Osborne. Before her departure the Queen visited Frogmore to choose a site for a mausoleum, where her beloved husband and she herself were yet to lie side by side."

The funeral took place at Windsor on December 23rd. The chief mourner was the Prince of Wales, who was

accompanied by Prince Arthur, a boy of eleven; the Duke of Saxe Coburg, the Prince Consort's only brother, was also there. The scene at the grave was very touching; the young princes sobbed bitterly, "and heartfelt sorrow was on the face of every mourner." Throughout the country there was long and genuine mourning for the "blameless Prince."

"There is no one to call me Victoria now," the Queen is said to have exclaimed, the morning of her bereavement,—and perhaps no words could have expressed more strongly the sense of her great loneliness.

There is a poem written by a contemporary poet, Christopher Riethmüller, which embodies this idea. Lady Waterford, in one of her graphic letters, mentions the poem:

"Toll, Great Bell of St. Paul!
Toll through the midnight air!
Bid all the people fall
Upon their knees in prayer!
For the dear Lady left
Upon her glittering throne,
More utterly bereft,
More hopelessly alone
Than the poor peasant's wife;
Because from her is riven
The only human life
That to her state was given
To help, control, and guide;
The only voice below
Which had the right to chide,
Or sweetest praise bestow!
Millions will love her still—
Ay, fondlier than before!
But the one equal will
Is gone for evermore."

The Marchioness of Waterford in another letter, speaking of her own loss, the death of her sister, Lady Canning, mentions the Queen's grief. "The Queen's most grievous calamity I can well feel for. I hear, from one who saw her, 'that it was heartrending to see her in her calm, eloquent

sorrow.' This beautiful resignation must endear her more than ever to her people."

"For some years after the death of the Prince Consort," as Dr. Macaulay tells us, "the Queen appeared very little in public. Overwhelmed with grief, she lived almost wholly in retirement; but we are assured that, even at that time, no official duty was neglected." Neither did she forget the troubles of others; for when that terrible Hartley colliery disaster occurred, by which 204 miners lost their lives, Her Majesty sent a message to the effect "that her tenderest sympathy is with the poor widows and mothers, and that her own misery only makes her feel the more for them."

Regrets, almost amounting to complaints, were heard from time to time, which led to a touching article in the *Times*. Some people affirmed that it was from the Queen's own pen; but, anyway, it embodied her feelings most truly.

After touching on these complaints, it goes on: "The Queen heartily appreciates the desire of her subjects to see her, and whatever she can do to gratify them in this loyal, affectionate wish, she will do. Whenever any real object is to be obtained by her appearing on public occasions, any national interest to be promoted, or anything to be encouraged which is for the good of her people, Her Majesty will not shrink, as she has not shrunk, from any personal sacrifice or exertion, however painful.

"But there are other and higher duties than those of mere representation which are now thrown on the Queen alone and unassisted, duties which she cannot neglect without injury to the public service, which weigh unceasingly upon her, overwhelming her with work and anxiety.

"The Queen has laboured conscientiously to discharge these duties, till her health and strength, already shaken by the utter and ever-abiding desolation which has taken the place of her happiness, have been seriously impaired. To call upon her to undergo, in addition, the fatigue of those