urged "that no claim on the Prince's behalf for the hand of his cousin should be preferred, unless an impression in his favour from personal acquaintance should first have been produced."

An invitation from the Duchess to the Duke of Coburg and his sons Ernest and Albert afforded an opportunity for the Princess to make the acquaintance of her cousins. "But," Stockmar wrote, "it must be made a *sine quâ non* that the object of the visit be kept strictly secret from the Princess, as well as from the Prince, so as to leave them completely at their ease."

The visitors remained nearly four weeks at Kensington Palace, and the cousins spent delightful days together, playing duets on the piano, sketching, walking and riding, and visiting the chief attractions of the Metropolis.

Prince Albert writes home in his simple, affectionate way: "Dear Aunt is very kind to us, and does everything she can to please us; and our cousin also is very amiable." The Queen, too, gave the following description of the Prince at this period: "The Prince was at this time very handsome, but very stout, which he entirely grew out of afterwards. He was most amiable, natural, unaffected, and merry, full of interest in everything."

The visit of the Royal youths was a complete success, and the Queen unconsciously revealed her favourable opinion of Prince Albert in her confidential letters to her uncle, King Leopold. They were both now about seventeen years old, the Queen completing her seventeenth year during the visit, the Prince three months later. Sir Theodore Martin, in his life of the Prince Consort, tells us "that almost simultaneously with the Princes leaving England, King Leopold made the Queen aware of his wishes on the subject. The answer made it impossible to doubt how entirely those of the Princess were in accordance with his own. "I have only now to beg you, my dearest uncle,"

it concludes, "to take care of the health of one now so dear to me, and to take him under your special protection. I hope and trust that all will go on prosperously and well on this subject now of so much importance to me." (Letter of Princess Victoria to King Leopold, June 7th, 1836.)

On May 24th, 1837, the Princess came legally of age. It was a time of great rejoicing. Kind messages came from Windsor, and a costly piano from the King; but he was too ill to be present at the State Ball at St. James's, nor could the Queen leave him.

We read that the Princess Victoria opened the ball with young Lord FitzAlan, son of the premier Duke in England, the Duke of Norfolk, and that she danced with Prince Esterhazy—"ablaze with diamonds as usual." A few days later Baron Stockmar arrived on the scene, and less than a month after that festal birthday William IV. breathed his last.

It is interesting to note that Princess Victoria made her last appearance in public as heiress presumptive at a Charity Ball given at the Opera House for the benefit of the Spitalfields weavers, and that her life as Princess was thus fitly closed by a charitable act.

ACCESSION AND MARRIAGE

CHAPTER II

VICTORIA REGINA

"God save thee, weeping Queen!
Thou shalt be well beloved;
The tyrant's sceptre cannot move,
As those poor tears have moved;
Tho' nature in thy eyes we see
Which tyrants cannot own—
The love that guardeth liberties,
Strange blessing on the nation lies
Whose Sovereign wept—
Yea, wept to wear a crown."—E. B. BROWNING.

"Life treads on life, and heart on heart,
We press too close in church and mart,
To keep a dream or grave apart."

So sang one of the sweetest of our English poets; but in this earthly existence of ours "the shadows of the prison-house" seem to environ us wherever we move, and our warm human personality shrinks from the cold touch of the dark angel's hand. Life and death, buoyant youth and senile decay, and light tripping feet moving with averted eyes among the graves!

The King is dead! The bluff, warm-hearted Sailor-King —so hasty of tongue, so kind of heart—"nothing in his life

became him like the leaving it." "Believe me, I am a religious man," he had said in his feeble voice to the Archbishop who was ministering to him; and more than once he had raised his dying eyes, as though in communion with the unseen King of kings, and murmured "Thy will be done."

Victoria Regina! God save the Queen! A Royal Idyll indeed!—it reads to us still like a fairy tale; we heard it first at our mother's knee, and hushed our young breaths as the thrilling story unfolded before us: the slumbering Palace in the dim light of that June morning, the sleeping Princess, the hurrying messengers: Dr. Howley, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Conyngham; the unavailing knocking, thumping, and ringing before the drowsy porter could be aroused. We read how, when the attendant hesitated about disturbing the Princess, so sweet and sound were her slumbers, the quick peremptoriness of the official reply, "We have come on business to the Queen, and even her sleep must give way to that." And then follows that quaint, natural word-picture drawn by Miss Wynn in her " Diary of a Lady of Quality ": "In a few minutes she [the Princess] came into the room in a loose white nightgown and shawl, her nightcap thrown off, and her hair falling upon her shoulders, her feet in slippers, tears in her eyes, but perfectly collected and dignified." In Mrs. Tooley's "Personal Life of Queen Victoria," she gives us the following interesting piece of information: "In 1863, when Dean Stanley was on a visit to the Queen at Osborne, he asked Her Majesty if she would give him an account of how the news of her accession was conveyed to her, which she did in the following words: "It was about 6 a.m. that mamma came and called me, and said I must go to see Lord Conyngham directly-alone. I got up, put on my dressing-gown, and went into a room, where I found Lord Conyngham, who knelt and

kissed my hand, and gave me the certificate of the King's death. In an hour Baron Stockmar came. He had been sent over by King Leopold on hearing of the King's dangerous illness. At 2 p.m. that same day (June 20th, 1837) I went to the council led by my two uncles, the King of Hanover and the Duke of Cambridge.'" But all accounts agree on one point: that the first words of the girl monarch on being informed of her new dignity were addressed to the Archbishop—"I ask your Grace to pray for me." Every episode of this memorable day is full of thrilling interest.

The young Queen's first Privy Council was held at Kensington Palace later that morning; and one can imagine the sensation and emotion that were excited when the doors were thrown open, and that girlish figure in mourning advanced, bowing quietly to her lords, and took her seat; and without embarrassment or tremor of nerves read her declaration in a clear silvery voice. Greville himself seemed to be struck with admiration at the young Queen's bearing. He tells us in his graphic way: "After she had read her speech and taken and signed the oath for the security of the Church of Scotland, the Privy Councillors were sworn, the two Royal Dukes first by themselves. And as these two old men, her uncles, knelt before her, swearing allegiance and kissing her hand, I saw her blush up to the eyes, as if she felt the contrast between their civil and natural relations; and this was the only sign of emotion which she evinced. Her manner to them was very graceful and engaging: she kissed them both, and rose from her chair and moved towards the Duke of Sussex, who was farthest from her and too infirm to reach her. She seemed rather bewildered at the multitude of men who were sworn, and who came one after another to kiss her hand; but she did not speak to anybody, nor did she make the slightest difference in her manner, or show any in her countenance, to any individual of rank, station, or party. I particularly watched her when

Melbourne and the Ministers and the Duke of Wellington and Peel approached her. She went through the whole ceremony, occasionally looking at Melbourne for instruction when she had any doubt what to do, which hardly ever occurred, with perfect calmness and self-possession, but at the same time with a graceful modesty and propriety particularly interesting and ingratiating."

This was a splendid eulogium from the "acid diarist." But the Duke of Wellington seemed also much impressed, and was heard to say "that if the Queen had been his own daughter he could not have desired to see her perform her part better."

Immediately after the Council, we are informed the Queen went to her mother's room and begged with deep emotion to be left in absolute solitude for two hours. No one dare invade that sacred privacy; but we may believe that that fair young head was bowed in earnest prayer for strength and wisdom to fulfil the duty of that high station to which she had been called in her youth—"Victoria Regina, by the grace of God, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland."

There is another incident on that day which deserves to be mentioned. One of her first acts had been to write a loving letter full of tenderest sympathy to the widowed Queen. Some one reading the superscription, "Her Majesty the Queen," observed that it should be "Her Majesty the Queen Dowager." "I am quite aware of Her Majesty's altered character," was the reply, "but I will not be the first person to remind her of it"—an answer instinct with the finest delicacy.

On the following morning, June 21st, the Queen, accompanied by her mo
The guns in the Park fired a salute at ten o'clock, and immediately the "little Queen" stood at the window of the Presence Chamber in full view of the crowd, while the band

of the Royal Guards struck up the National Anthem, and at its conclusion, while Sir William Woods, acting for the Garter King-at-Arms, and accompanied by the Duke of Norfolk as Earl Marshal of England, read aloud the proclamation. The Queen looked very pale and fatigued. She was dressed in deep mourning, with a white tippet, white cuffs, and a border of white lace under a small black bonnet, which was placed far back on her head, exhibiting her light hair in front, simply parted over her forehead. She appeared deeply affected at the acclamations of her people, and was observed to shed tears. Elizabeth Barrett Browning commemorated this touching incident in a lovely poem, the last stanza is exceptionally beautiful.

"God bless thee, weeping Queen!
With blessing more divine,
And fill with better love than earth's
That tender heart of thine;
That when the throne of earth shall be
As low as graves brought down,
A pierced Hand may give to thee
The crown which angels shout to see;
Thou will not weep
To wear that heavenly crown."

When the news of his cousin's accession reached Prince Albert, then a student at Bonn, he wrote to Her Majesty on June 26th: "Now you are Queen of the mightiest land of Europe, in your hand lies the happiness of millions. May Heaven assist you and strengthen you with its strength in that high but difficult task." And towards the end of the letter: "May I pray you to think likewise sometimes of your cousins in Bonn."

On July 13th the Queen took up her residence at Buckingham Palace, and four days later she went in state to dissolve Parliament. We read that the youthful Queen was dressed in white satin, with the ribbon of the Garter crossing her shoulder, and a magnificent tiara of diamonds

on her head, and a necklace and stomacher of costly brilliants; the Parliamentary mantle of crimson velvet and ermine being adjusted by the lords-in-waiting.

Fanny Kemble, who was present on this occasion, gives us an admirable description of the girl Queen. "The Queen is not handsome, but very pretty, and the singularity of her great position lent a sentimental and poetical charm to her youthful face and figure. The serene, serious sweetness of her candid brow and clear soft eyes gave dignity to the girlish countenance; while the want of height only added to the effect of extreme youth of the round but slender figure, and gracefully moulded hands and arms. The Queen's voice was exquisite, nor have I ever heard any spoken words more musical in their gentle distinctness than 'My Lords and Gentlemen,' which broke the breathless silence of the illustrious assembly, whose gaze was riveted on that fair flower of royalty. The enunciation was as perfect as the intonation was melodious, and I think it is impossible to hear a more excellent utterance than that of the Queen's English by the English Queen."

The first of Her Majesty's many deeds of mercy was performed soon after her accession, when she was called on to sign her first death warrant, presented her by the Duke of Wellington. It was a deserter condemned by court-martial; but the Queen, hearing that some witnesses had spoken for his character, wrote 'Pardoned' across the paper, and pushed it across the table, her hand trembling with emotion."

Her next act was to pay her father's debts—indeed, she never rested until all his liabilities had been discharged. His allowance had not been large, and his generosity had been great, and his indiscriminating charity had involved him in pecuniary embarrassment. "I want to pay all that remains of my father's debts," she said to the Prime Minister. "I must do it. I consider it a sacred duty."

Lord Melbourne said "that the earnestness and directness of that good daughter's manner when speaking of her father brought the tears to his eyes." Lord Melbourne was now her chief adviser. George Villiers told Greville "that he was exceedingly struck with Melbourne's manner to the Queen, and hers to him—his so parental and anxious, but always so respectful and deferential; hers indicative of such entire confidence, such pleasure in his society"; and later on, "I have no doubt he is passionately fond of her, as he might be of his own daughter if he had one—and the more because he is a man with a capacity for loving, without having anything in the world to love. It is become his province to educate, instruct and form the most interesting mind and character in the world."

From the very commencement of her reign the young Sovereign showed that untiring industry and remarkable aptitude for business that was to set such a noble example to her subjects. As we peruse contemporary records of her daily life we are reminded again and again of the child-princess holding out her little hand with the pathetic utterance, "I will be good." There is a very interesting account, that may be quoted with profit. "She [the Queen] gets up soon after eight o'clock, breakfasts in her own room, and is employed the whole morning in transacting business; she reads all the despatches, and has every matter of interest and importance in every department laid before her. At eleven or twelve Melbourne comes to her and stays an hour, more or less, according to the business he may have to transact. At two she rides with a large suite (and she likes to have it numerous); Melbourne always rides at her left hand, and the equerry-in-waiting on her right; she rides for two hours along the road, and the greater part of the time at a full gallop; after riding she amuses herself for the rest of the afternoon with music and singing, playing and romping with children, if there are any

in the Castle (and she is so fond of them that she generally contrives to have some there). The hour of dinner is nominally half-past seven o'clock, soon after which time the guests assemble, but she seldom appears before eight."

The account informs us that Melbourne always sat at her left hand at the dinner, and that the Queen would not allow the gentlemen to remain over their wine more than a quarter of an hour, but always remained standing in the drawing-room until they appeared. Coffee was then served, and after the Royal hostess had said a few words to each of her guests, the Duchess of Kent's whist table was arranged, the round table marshalled, Melbourne always seated at her left hand, and at half-past eleven the Queen retired.

The coronation of Her Majesty took place in Westminster Abbey on June 28th, 1838—a magnificent and soul-stirring spectacle, never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. Many shed tears when the fair young girl in her royal robes knelt before the faldstool in silent prayer. During the long wearisome ceremonial, which lasted for more than four hours, the youthful monarch played her part with a noble composure and dignity. One or two incidents were most impressive: one when the Westminster boys exercised their prerogative, and rising *en masse* shouted "Victoria, Victoria! Vivat Victoria Regina!" and again when the crown was placed on her head, and at the same moment the peers and peeresses put on their coronets, the trumpets sounded, the drums beat, and the Tower and Park guns fired their volleys. We are told that at this moment the Queen was visibly agitated, and that the Duchess of Kent was drowned in tears; "by a strong effort Her Majesty regained her composure," and the ceremonial continued. "No wonder," as an eyewitness informs us, "the crowned lady looked fatigued."

The next important event in the Queen's private life was