

The Queen and Prince Albert.

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I smiled sedately as we met—
But Aunty saw the whole proceeding,
And fell *instanter* in a pet
About my 'want of proper breeding.'
What is the good of coming down
To places by the sea, my Milly,
Where things that one may do in town
Are called ridiculous and silly?

THE QUEEN AND PRINCE ALBERT.*

THE Queen and Prince Albert! What familiar words are these! For how many years this conjunction of names was the most customary and the most pleasing that met the eye and ear. They were mingled together in the converse of the hour, in the thoughts and words of men, in aspirations of loyalty and goodwill, in the supplications of the solemn liturgy. The royal pair almost seemed to live a charmed life. There was almost something superhuman in the greatness and the happiness that belonged to them. How rich and affluent was that blest existence! Not alone that they were the highest in estate and rank, but there was affluence of thought, of feeling, of taste, of knowledge, and of principle. In the inscrutable wisdom of the Most High—inscrutable but doubtless full of mercy and meaning—the 'blameless Prince' was called away to still higher rank and estate, the affluence of 'the better things to come.' But the names of the Queen and Prince Albert are never to be dissociated. She and her people have lavished on his memory all the wealth of monument and device. Her Majesty has gone still further, and in the present volume she raises a monument of unique interest and importance which will take its place among the classics of literature. Such a work as this is unique in our own language or in any other language. Horace Walpole wrote of royal and noble authors, but it would never have entered Walpole's cold and

narrow mind to conceive of such a work as this. It is both a biography and an autobiography. It is a biography of Prince Albert; it is also an autobiography, the Queen's life written by the Queen herself. We might most fitly entitle our paper 'Victoria and Albert.' The lives are synchronous. From the first the princely boy is led to think of his royal cousin across the narrow seas as his future bride. For him she is 'the Flower of May.' Again and again there are points of contact in their lives, and then the marriage, so fair in the sight of heaven and earth, so infinitely blessing and blessed. There are many persons who could not understand the character of Prince Albert while he was living; there are some few who cannot understand it now he is gone. We should be sorry indeed if the case were otherwise. We should be sorry if the selfish and ignoble could comprehend that character and career so pure and stainless and serene. Even ordinary men, who are susceptible of being dazzled by brilliant qualities, who are attracted by wandering stars and meteoric fires, shrink from

'The pure severity of perfect light.'

In the exquisite unison and balance of faculties, in the sublime self-repression and self-abnegation, in the unwavering instincts of duty and religion, in the calm judicial tone of thought, in the unvarying devotion to intellectual labours, there almost appears something cold and austere, something removed from ordinary sympathies and ordinary experience; but this volume shows us that his character was essentially most human, affection-

* 'The Early Years of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort. Compiled under the direction of Her Majesty the Queen, by Lieut.-General the Hon. C. Grey.' London: Smith and Elder, 1867.

ate almost to morbid sensitiveness, keenly alive to every social and domestic feeling, reflecting every passing emotion of his profound and many-sided nature. We say deliberately that history hardly presents us with so perfect an example; examples the most nearly approximate to his are but to be found in his own Saxon ancestors, in our English Alfred, in St. Louis of France. We do not propose to criticise this volume; it belongs to a region separate and beyond criticism. There are persons who can 'botanise upon a mother's grave,' and there are persons who will read this book as they would read an ordinary critical or historical work. Even tried by such a standard as this the work will challenge and meet criticism and hold its own in any comparisons with contemporary biography, or biography far removed from being contemporary. But this is not the right mode in which such a work ought to be met—not the kind of test which we should wish, for ourselves or our readers, to be applied. We welcome the Queen's work as her gift to her loving people, as admitting them to a share in her sorrows and her memories, and our feelings can be only those of the deepest loyalty to our royal lady, and an earnest desire that we may be able to realize something of the mental and spiritual lineaments of our lost Prince.

When the Prince's bill of naturalisation was before the English parliament there were some ignorant sectarians who complained that the Prince was not styled a Protestant, and inquired if he really was such. These persons must have been strangely ignorant both of contemporary and past history. Had they never heard of the heroic ancestor of Prince Albert's, the friend and deliverer of Luther, who risked and lost his dominions against Charles V. in defence of the reformed doctrines? He, when the news was brought to him as he was playing at chess in his castle that he was to die, protested against the injustice of Charles, trusted that his wife would not yield her besieged fortress, and then challenged his adversary to

continue the game, and won it. Another ancestor, the Elector Frederick the Wise, magnanimously refused the crown of Germany, and was the means of conferring it upon that very Charles V.

Of such a stock came Prince Albert, and he inherited these ancestral qualities of courage and magnanimity. In consequence of their fidelity to their convictions the elder branch of the great Saxon family, the Ernestine, lost their inheritance, and the Saxon throne passed to the younger, the Albertine branch. The Coburg family, through the magnificent alliances which they have formed, have become the most powerful family in Europe, a late amends for the deprivation of the sixteenth century. The common grandmother of Prince Albert and of the Queen was the Dowager-Duchess of Coburg-Saalfeld, who always acted a mother's part towards the Prince, and looked earnestly forward to a marriage between the two, but died before the event happened. He was unfortunate in not knowing a mother's care, for his own mother was first separated and then divorced from his father, and died young, after a sad, lingering illness. The place of his birth was Rosenau, a summer residence of the Duke's, about four miles from Coburg, to which our own royal family have always been deeply attached, and the Dowager Duchess lived a little way out of the town on the other side. Although the Queen was a very young girl when her grandmother died, she perfectly recollects her, and describes her as 'a most remarkable woman, with a most powerful, energetic, almost masculine mind, accompanied with great tenderness of heart and extreme love for nature.' Certainly these qualities have been reproduced in her grandchildren, the Queen and the Prince; and her son Leopold, the King of the Belgians, conspicuously recalls many of her greatest qualities. Between King Leopold and his nephew and niece, the tenderest confidence and affection always existed. He, more than any other person, brought to pass the marriage, and to a degree, which was

perhaps hardly understood in his lifetime, he was to the last a most powerful influence in the affairs of the English court and of the nation. The earliest to the interesting appendices in this volume is also the most important one, and is entitled 'Reminiscences of King Leopold,' consisting almost entirely of a memoir written by the King himself at the request of Queen Victoria in 1862. This is deeply interesting, especially in the notices of the English royal family, and some abridged extracts will be a fit prelude to further remarks on the Queen and Prince Albert.

'Without meaning to say anything unkind of the other branches of the Saxon family, ours [to which the Queen and the Prince belonged] was more truly intelligent, and more naturally so, without affectation, or anything pedantic about it.'

'It was in January, at Berlin, that Prince Leopold received the invitation of the Prince Regent to come to England, and also an explanation from Lord Castlereagh. He left in fearfully cold weather for Coburg. He caught an inflammatory cold which detained him, to his great dismay, at Coburg, receiving the most pressing letters from England to hasten his arrival. It was painful to be quite unable to set out, and only in February could he leave Coburg. At Calais he was detained by stormy weather. In London he found Lord Castlereagh, with whom he went to Brighton, to be presented to the Prince Regent, who received him graciously, though suffering from gout. He spoke about the Princess Charlotte and his plans about her. There were no formal fiançailles, but the marriage was declared as being fully decided. Claremont, the property of Mr. R. Ellis, was selected by Prince Leopold, after having seen other places. In September the Prince and Princess established themselves there. Unfortunately the season was uncommonly rainy. The Orleans family came to Claremont and were visited at Twickenham. The Princess's health was liable to be a little deranged. Her nerves had suffered much during the last few years.

She improved, however, visibly, at Claremont. From March there began to be hopes. The Princess's health was in a satisfactory state. She gave up, however, walking too much, which proved pernicious. November saw the ruin of this happy home, and the destruction at one blow of every hope and happiness of Prince Leopold. He has never recovered the feeling of happiness which had blessed his short married life.

'The Duke of Kent had offered his hand to the Princess of Leiningen, but her position as guardian of her children created delays. Princess Charlotte, who loved tenderly her uncle, the Duke of Kent, was most ardently desirous of this union, and most impatient to see it concluded. The Regent was not kind to his brother [the Duke of Kent]. At every instant something or other of an unpleasant nature arose. The Duke and Duchess resided repeatedly at Claremont. Prince Leopold made in August an excursion to Scotland and through various parts of England. He received everywhere the most enthusiastic welcome. The Regent was not pleased with this journey. 1820, Prince Leopold was at Lord Craven's when the news arrived that a cold which the Duke got at Salisbury, visiting the cathedral, had become alarming. Soon after the Prince's arrival the Duke breathed his last. The Duchess, who lost a most amiable and devoted husband, was in a state of the greatest distress. It was fortunate that Prince Leopold had not been out of the country, or the poor Duke had left his family deprived of all means of existence. The journey to Kensington was most painful, and the weather, at the same time, very severe. King George III. died almost at the same moment as his son. King George IV. showed himself at the first moment very affable to Prince Leopold.'

This affability did not continue after Prince Leopold had visited Queen Charlotte, and after the proceedings against her had been given up—an issue to which Prince Leopold's call had contributed. 'The King was furious, and particularly

against Prince Leopold. He never forgave it; being very vindictive, though he occasionally showed kinder sentiments, particularly during Mr. Canning's being minister. He, of course, at first declared that he would never see the Prince again. However, the Duke of York arranged an interview. The King could not resist his curiosity, and got Prince Leopold to tell him how Queen Caroline was dressed, and all sorts of details.'

Very interesting notices are given of the childhood and girlhood of the Queen, though not with the same fullness as is the case with Prince Albert, which is, of course, as it ought to be, in a formal biography of the Prince. The Dowager-Duchess of Coburg writes to her daughter, the Duchess of Kent, 'How pretty the *May Flower* (the Princess, now Queen, Victoria) will be when I see it in a year's time. Siebold cannot sufficiently describe what a dear little love it is. . . . The English like Queens, and the niece of the ever-lamented, beloved Charlotte will be most dear to them.' She again writes: 'I see by the English newspapers that "his Majesty and H.R.H. the Duchess of Kent went on Virginia Water." The little monkey must have pleased and amused him. She is such a pretty, clever child.' King Leopold mentions in his memoir that in 1824 the Duchess of Kent repeatedly spent some time at Claremont. The Queen subjoins in a note, 'These were the happiest days of the Queen's childhood.' Again, when King Leopold relates how he refused the crown of Greece on a dispute respecting the frontier of the new kingdom, the Queen writes: 'The Queen well remembers her joy when this took place, as she adored her uncle, and was in despair at the thought of his departure for Greece.' Some more passages from the letters of the Queen and Prince's grandmother relate to her. When the eleventh year was completed she writes: 'My blessing and good wishes for the day which gave you the sweet blossom of May! May God preserve and protect the valuable life of that lovely flower from all the dangers

that will beset her mind and heart! The rays of the sun are scorching at the height to which she may one day attain. It is only by the blessing of God that all the fine qualities He has put into that young soul can be kept pure and untarnished. How well I can sympathise with the feelings of anxiety that must possess you when that time comes. God, who has helped you through so many bitter hours of grief, will be your help still. Put your trust in Him.' Again, when George the Fourth dies, she writes: 'God bless old England, where my beloved children live, and where the sweet blossom of May may one day reign! May God yet for many years keep the weight of a crown from her young head! and let the intelligent dear child grow up to girlhood before this dangerous grandeur devolves upon her.' Once more: 'May God bless and protect our little darling! If I could but once see her again! The print you sent me of her is not like the dear picture I have. The quantity of curls hide the well-shaped head and make it look too large for the lovely little figure.'

We now turn to the companion portrait of Prince Albert, which is sketched more largely and carefully. There is always a difficulty in forming a due estimate of the accounts which are given of the childhood. Mere precocity is frequently unhealthy, and the minds that mature best, commonly enough, have not been precocious. Much of the flush and efflorescence of youth passes away and leaves no solid fruit. The Prince appears to have been a child of remarkable physical beauty, in the opinion of those capable of forming a clear judgment and not likely to be misled by a blind unreasoning admiration for infantile graces. There are several notices, however, which, from his premature death, acquire a mournful significance, which appear to indicate that, though strong and active, he had not much real strength of constitution, and was ill fitted to cope against disease. He was hardly four years old when he was taken from his nurse and confided to the

care of a tutor, and we have actually his letters and journals before he was six. The annals of the British nursery very rarely supply incidents of such extreme forwardness. In his childhood we find him constantly at Gotha, to which duchy his father had succeeded; and his maternal grandmother, or rather his mother's stepmother, the Duchess-Dowager of Gotha, after the death of the good Duchess-Dowager of Coburg, to whose letters we have been so much indebted, became his nearest and most beloved female relative.

The education of the Prince appears to us to be rather remarkable for its compass and variety than for its depth. But an education must be considered with reference to its scope and object. It was not desired that he should become an exact scholar, or a profound *savant* or great artist, but it was eminently desirable that he should have a liberal tincture of them, a comprehensive education, an education in which the accomplishments of life should have an equal place with its serious studies. Such a scheme of education appears to have received the deliberate approval of Prince Albert; it appears to have been the education which he himself received, and which he carefully planned for his children. The programme of study which he sketched out for himself at Rosenau, in his fourteenth year, amounts to nine hours' work a day, which we think a great deal too much. Let us hope that, like many other such programmes, it was not very rigorously adhered to, and that the allotted hours were not always occupied by the full strain of attention. Still there was an extreme assiduity and intense devotion to intellectual labour. He refuses the holidays which might interrupt his studies, and as a boy is busy with profound studies which might occupy the attention of the matured philosopher. He is not alone occupied with books, but he is fond of natural history, and had that enthusiasm for natural scenery which is the purest and deepest of all enjoyments. In perusing the account of the boyhood of the Prince, we become conscious of the only de-

fect or awkwardness which belongs to the work. The defect we mean is almost unavoidable when a work intended for a most restricted private circulation is made public property. There are little details, full of value and interest for the inner family and near relatives, which hardly ought to be brought before the public, that perceives the minuteness but only partially shares that personal knowledge which among personal intimates would save them from the imputation of triviality. We can hardly, however, regret them, as they serve to give a character of thoroughness and honesty to the work, which is one of its most substantial merits. We return to the narrative of the growth of the Prince's mind. So studious has he been that we begin to apprehend that young people will put him down as a bookworm. But he is also passionately fond of music and of the natural sciences, and he also excels in manly exercises, even distancing all competitors; an observant traveller also, and altogether the model kind of man. He was fond of dramatic representations; he had a keen sense of the ridiculous, and possessed the dangerous gift of caricature; all of which he seems resolutely to have laid aside when it was best to do so. At the university of Bonn he attained the highest reputation, and a formal address was presented to him when he left — of which we are surprised to find no mention in this work — of a kind to the last degree honourable to him. The following are General Grey's remarks, endorsed by the Queen, after the mention of the Prince's confirmation. 'His was no lip service. His faith was essentially one of the heart, a real and living faith, giving a colour to his whole life. Deeply imbued with a conviction of the great truths of Christianity, his religion went far beyond mere forms, to which, indeed, he attached no special importance. It was not with him a thing to be taken up and ostentatiously displayed with almost pharisaical observance, on certain days, or at certain seasons, or on certain formal occasions. It was part of *himself*. It was en-

grafted in his very nature and directed his every-day life. In his every action, the spirit—as distinguished from the letter—the spirit and essence of Christianity was his constant and unerring guide.’

The history of the courtship and marriage is, after all, briefly told. In 1836 the Prince saw his future bride for the first time. They were then both in their seventeenth year, the Queen being the elder by three months. He writes: ‘Dear aunt is very kind to us, and does everything she can to please us; and our cousin also is very amiable. We have not a great deal of room in our apartment, but are nevertheless very comfortably lodged.’ After this visit there was a general idea that a marriage was certain, but the notion was most premature. The cousins, however, corresponded. Writing to his father, Prince Albert says: ‘The day before yesterday I received a second and still kinder letter from my cousin, in which she thanks me for my good wishes on her birthday.’ On her accession he again writes to congratulate her, perhaps a little stiffly. Then, according to the advice of his uncle, he took a tour in Switzerland and Italy, apparently to distract public attention from his pretensions. He sent the Queen *souvenirs* of his travels, such as a dried Alpine rose and autograph writings of Voltaire’s. ‘The whole of these,’ her Majesty writes, ‘were placed in a small album, with the dates at which each place was visited, in the Prince’s handwriting; and this album the Queen now considers one of her greatest treasures, and never goes anywhere without it. Nothing had at this time passed between the Queen and the Prince; but this gift shows that the latter, in the midst of his travels, had not forgotten his young cousin.’ King Leopold earnestly desired that the two might be a pair. Nothing seemed more fair and reasonable. But sad experience had taught the wary Nestor of monarchs, that, just because it was so fair and reasonable, the best-laid plan might be deranged by the chapter of accidents. There were various other competitors for the hand of the youthful Queen. King

William in his lifetime had been opposed to the match, but it is believed—and this is only in accordance with his kindhearted character—that he would have withdrawn his opposition if he had understood that his niece’s affections were engaged. After the Queen’s statement that in 1836 there was nothing between them, there is a gap left in the narrative; but in 1838 we find the Prince writing that ‘the Queen had in no way altered her mind, but she did not wish to marry for some time yet.’ The Queen now expresses her deep regret that a formal engagement had not been made at least a year earlier than it came to pass. In 1839 Prince Albert was again in this country. The correspondence had languished, but the Prince was now resolved that matters should be brought to an issue. Her Majesty writes, in high-souled language of affection and candour such as never before has been uttered from a throne—

‘Nor can the Queen now think without indignation against herself, of her wish to keep the Prince waiting for probably three or four years, at the risk of ruining all his prospects for life, until she might feel inclined to marry! And the Prince has since told her that he came over in 1839 with the intention of telling her, that if she could not then make up her mind, she must understand that he could not now wait for a decision, as he had done at a former period when this marriage was first talked about.

‘The only excuse the Queen can make for herself is in the fact that the sudden change from the secluded life at Kensington to the independence of her position as Queen Regnant, at the age of eighteen, put all ideas of marriage out of her mind, which she now most bitterly repents.

‘A worse school for a young girl, or one more detrimental to all natural feelings and affections, cannot well be imagined than the position of a Queen at eighteen, without experience and without a husband to guide and support her. This the Queen can state from painful experience; and she thanks God that

none of her dear daughters are exposed to such danger.'

Very soon after his arrival the Queen sent for him, 'and,' writes Prince Albert, 'declared to me in a genuine outburst of love and affection, that I had gained her whole heart, and would make her intensely happy if I would make her the sacrifice of sharing her life with her.' When she announced her forthcoming marriage to the Council she wore his portrait on her bracelet, which she declared gave her courage. It was understood that the match was one of affection, and this heightened the national joy. The marriage speedily followed. The 'Times' account of it is reprinted in an appendix. We there read: 'Her Majesty came next, looking anxious and excited. She was paler even than usual. Her Majesty wore the Collar of the Garter, but no other diamonds or jewels. Her attendants were arrayed with similar simplicity. Her Majesty spoke in a firm voice and a tone audible in all parts of the chapel.'

Her Majesty is now married; and from time to time we obtain glimpses of a rare happiness such as has seldom been paralleled in the cottage, and perhaps never on the throne. Prince Albert was indeed a very young man, little more than a boy, but gifted with a sweet and serious wisdom beyond his years. His destiny seemed, and really was, most brilliant; but none the less it was truly a sacrifice: it involved trouble to his own home and his native land, a rending of many heart-strings. But Prince Albert's character was one that never shrank from any sacrifice, and found its

element in self-denial. Modestly, tentatively, firmly he established his own place, as master of his household, as a ruling voice of council, as one whose individuality was absolutely blended with the Queen's. By a legal fiction he might be a subject, but the Queen always rested on her marriage oath that she should obey him. Unostentatiously but perseveringly he adhered to the somewhat stern line of duty which he had marked out for himself, true to his own fame, to his wife, and to Heaven.

Her Majesty has written of their wedded love in passages of almost inimitable pathos and beauty. We only refrain from quoting them because by this time they must have found their way to the hands and the hearts of all her subjects. It is not without emotion that we part from this fascinating volume. Its interest is absolutely unique. Simply as a collection of State papers, as materials for personal royal history, it has a value and a verity which attaches to no similar collection. We shall wait with profoundest interest for the forthcoming volumes, which are to be edited by Mr. Theodore Martin. They will be richer, perhaps, in political matters—of which we find some adumbrations in the present volume—but it is hardly possible that they can excel in the intense interest of the personal history. It is impossible for any man to read this book without a quickened sense of loyalty towards the Queen, a deeper veneration for the character and career of Albert the Good, and a profound feeling of sympathy and homage for the revelation of so much love and so much sorrow.

