

CORONATION

Queen Victoria (1819–1901)

Thursday, 28 June 1838

I was awoke at four o'clock by the guns in the Park, and could not get much sleep afterwards on account of the noise of the people, bands, etc., etc. Got up at seven, feeling strong and well; the Park presented a curious spectacle, crowds of people up to Constitution Hill, soldiers, bands, etc. I dressed, having taken a little breakfast before I dressed, and a little after. At half-past 9 I went into the next room, dressed exactly in my House of Lords costume; and met Uncle Ernest, Charles, and Feodore (who had come a few minutes before into my dressing-room), Lady Lansdowne, Lady Normanby, the Duchess of Sutherland, and Lady Barham, all in their robes.

At 10 I got into the State Coach with the Duchess of Sutherland and Lord Albemarle and we began our Progress. I subjoin a minute account of the whole Procession and of the whole Proceeding,—the route, etc. It was a fine day, and the crowds of people exceeded what I have ever seen; many as there were the day I went to the City, it was nothing, nothing to the multitudes, the millions of my loyal subjects, who were assembled *in every spot* to witness the Procession. Their good humour and excessive loyalty was beyond everything, and I really cannot say *how* proud I feel to be the Queen of *such* a Nation. I was alarmed at times for fear that the people would be crushed and squeezed on account of the tremendous rush and pressure.

I reached the Abbey amid deafening cheers at a little after half-past eleven; I first went into a robing-room quite close to the entrance where I found my eight train-bearers: Lady Caroline Lennox, Lady Adelaide Paget, Lady Mary Talbot, Lady Fanny Cowper, Lady Wilhelmina Stanhope, Lady Anne Fitzwilliam, Lady Mary Grimston, and Lady Louisa Jenkinson—all dressed alike and beautifully in white satin and silver tissue with wreaths of silver corn-ears in front, and a small one of pink roses round the plait behind, and pink roses in the trimming of the dresses.

After putting on my mantle, and the young ladies having properly got hold of it and Lord Conyngham holding the end of it, I left the robing-room and the Procession began as is described in the annexed account, and all that followed and took place. The sight was splendid; the bank of Peeresses quite beautiful all in their robes, and the Peers on the other side. My young train-bearers were always near me, and helped me whenever I wanted anything. The Bishop of Durham stood on the side near me, but he was, as Lord Melbourne told me, remarkably *maladroit*, and never could tell me what was to take place. At the beginning of the Anthem, where I've made a mark, I retired to St Edward's Chapel, a dark small place immediately behind the Altar, with my ladies and train-bearers—took off my crimson robe and kirtle, and put on the supertunica of cloth of gold, also in the shape of a kirtle, which was put over a singular sort of little gown of linen trimmed with lace; I also took off my circlet of diamonds and then proceeded bare-headed into the Abbey; I was then seated upon St Edward's chair, where the Dalmatic robe was clasped round me by the Lord Great Chamberlain. Then followed all the various things; and last (of those things) the Crown being placed on my head—which was, I must own, a most beautiful impressive moment; *all* the Peers and Peeresses put on their coronets at the same instant.

My excellent Lord Melbourne, who stood very close to me throughout the whole ceremony, was *completely* overcome at this moment, and very much affected; he gave me *such* a kind, and I may say *fatherly* look. The shouts, which were very great, the drums, the trumpets, the firing of the guns, all at the same instant, rendered the spectacle most imposing.

The Enthronisation and the Homage of, first, all the Bishops, and then my Uncles, and lastly of all the Peers, in their respective order was very fine. The Duke of Norfolk (holding for me the Sceptre with a Cross) with Lord Melbourne stood close to me on my right, and the Duke of Richmond with the other Sceptre on my left, etc., etc. All my train-bearers, etc., standing behind the Throne. Poor old Lord Rolle, who is 82, and dreadfully infirm, in attempting to ascend the steps fell and rolled quite down, but was not the least hurt; when he attempted to re-ascend them I got up and advanced to the end of the steps, in order to prevent another fall. When Lord Melbourne's turn to do Homage came, there was loud cheering; they also cheered Lord Grey and the Duke of Wellington; it's a pretty ceremony; they first all touch the Crown, and then kiss my hand. When my good Lord Melbourne knelt down and kissed my hand, he pressed my hand and I grasped his with all my heart, at which he looked up with his eyes filled with tears and seemed much touched, as he was, I observed, throughout the whole ceremony. After the Homage was concluded I left the Throne, took off my Crown and received the Sacrament; I then put on my Crown again, and re-ascended the Throne, leaning on Lord Melbourne's arm. At the commencement of the Anthem I descended from the Throne, and went into St Edward's Chapel with my Ladies, Train-bearers, and Lord Willoughby, where I took off the

Dalmatic robe, supertunica, etc., and put on the Purple Velvet Kirtle and Mantle, and proceeded again to the Throne, which I ascended leaning on Lord Melbourne's hand.

There was another most dear Being present at this ceremony, in the box immediately above the royal box, and who witnessed all; it was my dearly beloved angelic Lehzen, whose eyes I caught when on the Throne, and we exchanged smiles. She and Späth, Lady John Russell, and Mr. Murray saw me leave the Palace, arrive at the Abbey, leave the Abbey and again return to the Palace!!

I then again descended from the Throne, and repaired with all the Peers bearing the Regalia, my Ladies and Train-bearers, to St Edward's Chapel, as it is called; but which, as Lord Melbourne said, was more *unlike* a Chapel than anything he had ever seen; for what was *called* an *Altar* was covered with sandwiches, bottles of wine, etc., etc. The Archbishop came in and *ought* to have delivered the Orb to me, but I had already got it, and he (as usual) was *so* confused and puzzled and knew nothing, and—went away. Here we waited some minutes. Lord Melbourne took a glass of wine, for he seemed completely tired. The Procession being formed, I replaced my Crown (which I had taken off for a few minutes), took the Orb in my left hand and the Sceptre in my right, and thus *loaded*, proceeded through the Abbey—which resounded with cheers, to the first robing-room; where I found the Duchess of Gloucester, Manna, and the Duchess of Cambridge with their Ladies. And here we waited for at least an hour, with *all* my ladies and train-bearers; the Princesses went away about half an hour before I did. The Archbishop had (most awkwardly) put the ring on the wrong finger, and the consequence was that I had the greatest difficulty to take it off again, which I at last did with great pain. Lady Fanny, Lady Wilhelmina, and Lady Mary Grimston looked quite beautiful. At about half-past four I re-entered my carriage, the Crown on my head, and the Sceptre and Orb in my hands, and we proceeded the same way as we came—the crowds if possible having increased. The enthusiasm, affection, and loyalty were really touching, and I shall ever remember this day as the *Proudest* of my life! I came home at a little after six, really *not* feeling tired.

At eight we dined. Besides we thirteen—my Uncles, sister, brother, Späth, and the Duke's gentlemen—my excellent Lord Melbourne and Lord Surrey dined here. Lord Melbourne came up to me and said: "I must congratulate you on this most brilliant day," and that all had gone off so well. He said he was not tired, and was in high spirits. I sat between Uncle Ernest and Lord Melbourne; and Lord Melbourne between me and Feodore, whom he had led in. My kind Lord Melbourne was much affected in speaking of the whole ceremony. He asked kindly if I was tired; said the Sword he carried (the first, the Sword of State) was excessively heavy. I said that the Crown hurt me a good deal. He was so much amused at Uncle Ernest's being astonished at our still having the Litany. We agreed that the whole thing was a very fine sight. He thought the robes, and particularly the Dalmatic, "looked remarkably well." "And you did it all so well—excellent!" said he, with tears in his eyes. He said he thought I looked rather pale and "moved by all the people" when I arrived; "and that's natural; and that's better." The Archbishop's and Dean's copes, which were remarkably handsome, were from James the Second's time; the very same that were worn at his Coronation, Lord Melbourne told me. Spoke of the Bishop of Durham's awkwardness, Lord Rolle's fall, etc. Of the Duc de Nemours being like his father in face; of the young ladies' (train-bearers') dresses; which he thought beautiful; and he said he thought the Duchess of Richmond (who had ordered the make of the dresses, etc., and had been much condemned by some of the young ladies for it) quite right. She said to him: "One thing I was determined about; that I would have no discussion with their Mammams about it." Spoke of Talleyrand and Soult having been very much struck by the ceremony of the Coronation; of the English being far too generous *not* to be kind to Soult. Lord Melbourne went home the night before, and slept very deeply till he was woke at six in the morning. I said I did not sleep well. Spoke of the Illuminations and Uncle Ernest's wish to see them.

After dinner, before we sat down, we (that is Charles, Lord Melbourne, and I) spoke of the numbers of Peers at the Coronation, which, Lord Melbourne said, with the tears in his eyes, was unprecedented. I observed that there were very few Viscounts; he said: "There are very few Viscounts," that they were an odd sort of title and not really English; that they came from *Vice-Comités*; that Dukes and Barons were the only *real* English titles; that Marquises were likewise not English; and that they made people Marquises when they did not wish to make them Dukes. Spoke of Lord Audley who came as the First Baron, and who Lord Melbourne said was a very odd young man, but of a very old family; his ancestor was a Sir Something Audley in the time of the Black Prince, who, with Chandos, gained the Battle of Poitiers.

I then sat on the sofa for a little while with Lady Barham and then with Charles; Lord Melbourne sitting near me the whole evening. Mamma and Feodore remained to see the illuminations and only came in later, and Mamma went away before I did. Uncle Ernest drove out to see the Illuminations.

I said to Lord Melbourne when I first sat down that I felt a little tired on my feet; “You must be very tired,” he said. Spoke of the weight of the Robes, etc., etc., the Coronets; and he turned round to me with the tears in his eyes, and said *so* kindly: “And you did it beautifully—every part of it, with so much taste; it’s a thing that you can’t give a person advice upon; it must be left to a person.” To hear this, from this kind impartial friend, gave me great and real pleasure. Mamma and Feodore came back just after he said this. Spoke of the Bishops’ Copes, about which he was very funny; of the Pages who were such a nice set of boys, and who were so handy, Lord Melbourne said, that they kept them the whole time. Little Lord Stafford and Slane (Lord Mountcharles) were pages to their fathers and looked lovely; Lord Paget (not a fine boy) was Lord Melbourne’s page and remarkably handy, he said. Spoke again of the young ladies’ dresses, about which he was very amusing; he waited for his carriage with Lady Mary Talbot and Lady Wilhelmina; he thinks Lady Fanny does not make as much show as other girls, which I would not allow. He set off for the Abbey from his house at half-past eight, and was there long before anybody else; he only got home at half-past six and had to go round by Kensington. He said there was a large breakfast in the Jerusalem Chamber where they met *before* all began; he said, laughing, that whenever the Clergy, or a Dean and Chapter, had anything to do with anything, there’s sure to be plenty to eat.

Spoke of my intending to go to bed, etc.; he said, “You may depend upon it, you are more tired than you think you are.” I said I had slept badly the night before; he said that was my mind, that nothing kept people more awake than any consciousness of a great event going to take place, and being agitated. He was not sure if he was not going to the Duke of Wellington’s.

Stayed in the dining room till twenty minutes past eleven, but remained on Mamma’s balcony looking at the fireworks in Green Park, which were quite beautiful.

Uncle Ernest, Charles, Feodore, and the Ladies and Gentlemen (like Lehzen, etc.) saw me leave the Palace, arrive at the Abbey, leave the Abbey, and return to the Palace. Got a long letter from Aunt Louise.

Arthur Christopher Benson, ed. *The Letters of Queen Victoria* (London: 1908), I:120–125.