THE LAST DAYS OF KING WILLIAM IV

BY

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Some Recollections
of
The last days of His late
Majesty King William
the Fourth --

The following account of the last days of His Majesty King William the Fourth, was drawn up by the Revd. J. Wood, and a few copies printed, by the desire of Her Majesty Queen Adelaide, from memoranda of her own, and given by Her Majesty to a few select friends.—

1837

Though a slight decline of strength had been perceptible to the immediate attendants of our lamented King, at the commencement of the year, yet it was not till the Month of May, that the state of His Majesty's health excited any serious apprehension. On the 17th of that Month His Majesty held a levee, but on his return to Windsor Castle, showed great debility and exhaustion, and oppression of breathing, in consequence of which he had considerable difficulty in ascending the staircase; and when he had reached the corridor, was under the necessity

of resting on the nearest Sofa.
Though the King had experienced
very considerable oppression during
the night, yet His Majesty appeared
refreshed, and was considered better
the next Morning, Thursday,
May 18th, and was not prevented
from going to St James's to hold
a drawing room, which had been
appointed for that day. On
this occasion, the last on which
His Majesty appeared in public,
he sat down, but this deviation
from his usual practice did
not excite so much alarm as the
traces of sickness visible in his
countenance. His debility, however,
notwithstanding the exertions of
the day, on reaching Windsor Castle

was not so great on this as on the preceding evening, and a slight improvement the following morning revived the hopes and spirits of his Majesty's anxious friends. This day, Friday, May 19th was the anniversary of the battle of La Hogue, and by command of his Majesty several officers of distinction residing in the neighbourhood, together with the field officers of the garrison, had been invited to dinner. In the course of the evening, the King detailed, with great minuteness, the causes, progress, and consequence of the different naval wars in which this country had been engaged, during the last and

preceding century, and gave per=
=haps, greater proof on that than
on any other occasion of the extra=
=ordinary accuracy of his memory,
and of his intimate acquaintance
with English history. His Majesty's
voice, with the exception of one or
two moments of expression of breathing,
was very strong and clear; but no
one present could fail to entertain
apprehension as to the effects of
this exertion. The next day, Saturday
May 20th His Majesty continued to
suffer from the same distressing
symptoms. At breakfast and
lunch, his appetite, which had
been gradually declining altogether
failed, and at the latter meal
he fainted, to which several

persons attended with strong expressions of alarm. His Majesty, on leaving the White drawing room, sat down in the corridor, evidently feeble and exhausted. He did not leave the Castle this afternoon.

At dinner was affected by a similar seizure, and to prevent increasing faintness, the Duchess of Gloucester, who was seated next him, bathed his forehead and temples with eau de cologne.

His Majesty rallied in the evening but it was not till ten o'clock that he consented in compliance with the Queens request to abandon his intention of going to St. James' the following day to be present at the reopening of the Chapel Royal.

The King retired to bed at his usual hour of eleven, labouring under manifest indisposition. This was the last time His Majesty appeared in the drawing room.

The next morning increasing indisposition confined him to his private apartments, which he never quitted during the continuance of his fatal malady. The state of His Majesty's health now excited much alarm. Sir A. Halford and Dr Chambers were sent for; but as the latter had no ostensible situation in the Royal household, it was thought advisable, in order to avoid causing any unnecessary alarm to the King, to introduce him to His Majesty as the Medical attendant of the Queen,

who had at this time but very imperfectly recovered from a long and dangerous illness, on the ground that he wished to make a report of Her Majesty's health. Dr. Chambers was most graciously received by the King, who did not hesitate to avail himself of his advice in his own case. The arrival, however, of Dr. Chambers at the Castle was so late, that the interview did not take place till the following Morning. It were needless to trace minutely the progress of the Kings disease, the fluctuating nature of which produced constant alternations of hope and fear. On Monday, May 22nd, and the following Morning the King gave audience to Lord Melbourne, Lord Hill, Lord

Glenely, and other Ministers, but the unfavourable impression produced by the King's appearance on all who were admitted to his presence served but to extend the alarm now generally entertained. The next two days were past uncomfortably from the effects of fatigue; but on Saturday, May 27th His Majesty felt sufficiently strong to hold a Council, and subsequently to give audience to all the Cabinet Ministers, and Officers of State, by whom it was attended. That the King's disease had already made very rapid and alarming progress, may be inferred from the fact that he had already lost the power of walking, and that it was now necessary for his Medical attendant, Dr. Davies, to

whose aloe. the King would instead
that day, to wheel His Majesty
in his easy chair into the council
room. The general languor and
weakness which so strongly characte=
=rised the Kings illness, though not
diminished during the last week,
and His Majesty's anxious relatives
and friends were willing, in the
absence of any very active disease,
to ascribe the continuance of these
distressing symptoms to the hot
weather which then prevailed,
and which had frequently been
known to produce at this season
in former years a very marked
effect on His Majesty's constitution.
The King had looked forward
with pleasure to the assembling of

a large party which had been invited to Windsor Castle to be present at the Eton Regatta on June 5th, and at Ascot Races, which immediately followed. In the afternoon of this day an unfavourable change in the King's state was evident to his attendants. With his usual benevolent feeling, however, he still, for the sake of others, took an interest in those amusements in which he could not personally participate.

Every order issued by the King bore evidence of his very kind consideration, even in the most minute particulars, for the comfort and convenience of his guests, and of the Eton Boys, whose pleasure he was always anxious to promote.

Influenced by a similar feeling so predominant in Her Majesty's character, and so remarkably exemplified in the closing years of her life, the Queen expressed her special desire that the Queen should attend the Races at Ascot — preferring rather to dispense with the great comfort of Her Majesty's society than that the public should experience any disappointment from the absence of the Royal Family. However little in accordance with the simple state of her own anxious feelings such a scene might be, the Queen did not hesitate to acquiesce in the King's wishes. Her Majesty, therefore drove to the course, but returned at the end of two hours to Windsor Castle

to resume her almost unceasing attendance on the King, and to find alas! that even in that brief interval His Majesty had undergone much and unexpected suffering. The next Morning, June 4th Sir A. Halford and Dr. Chambers found the King weaker, but cordials supplied temporary strength and power to take nourishment, which supported him during the day. Nevertheless, the greatest gloom, and even the most melancholy forebodings, prevailed the Party assembled in the Castle, which were distressingly manifest, as it will doubtless with pain be remembered, by all who were present at dinner on that day in St. George's Hall.

For some time previously, the King's medical attendants had indulged the sanguine hope that His Majesty might derive considerable benefit from change of air. Many circumstances had combined to prevent an earlier proposal of any plan which had reference to this object; but with the concurrence of the Physicians Sir Herbert Taylor this day submitted to His Majesty the wish that he should remove for a few weeks to Brighton, where, with the advantage of the sea air, he would enjoy every comfort requisite in his present enfeebled state. The King did, not, as it was feared, express any disapprobation at the suggestion, on the contrary he expected with pleasure

to the arrangement, and expressed his hope that he soon might regain sufficient strength to undertake the journey. Preparations were accordingly made by His Majesty's command at the Pavilion. The kindness of the King's disposition was displayed even in the selection of the persons whom he appointed to attend him.

The state of His Majesty's health kept declining (rendered worse by a sleepless night) was such as to damp any hope that might have been entertained with regard to his removal to Brighton. Increased difficulty of breathing, stoppage of the circulation, with the necessary consequences of coldness of the extremities, and swelling of the legs, were among

the symptoms which could not fail to excite the fear that the King's situation had now become one of extreme danger. Under these circumstances, the party staying at the Castle dispersed this Morning, Monday June 8th in obedience to the Queen's wishes; and while grief and despondency reigned within the palace, the same feelings were quickly propagated among an affectionate and loyal people, by the unexpected absence of the royal cortège from Ascot. Contrary to expectation, the King passed a tranquil night. He was easier the next morning, but appeared very languid and feeble while transacting business with Sir Herbert Taylor, and his

Signature of official papers were made with difficulty. His Majesty now, for the first time, consented that a bulletin should be issued, to allay if possible, the anxiety which the public had long manifested.

In the afternoon of this day His Majesty experienced great and instantaneous relief from medicines which produced very copious expectoration. The amendment was so decided and evident as to inspire hope that it might be more than temporary, and His Majesty was certainly enabled to pass the ensuing day without any distressing oppression of his breathing. For this alleviation of the pain as well as for the more tranquil rest, which he enjoyed during two successive

nights, the gratitude to the Almighty felt and expressed by His Majesty was truly edifying. He was frequently heard to give utterance to these sentiments, with eyes raised to Heaven, in the most sincere and unaffected terms. His patience and cheerfulness had at all times excited the astonishment and admiration of all who had opportunity of witnessing them. No murmur ever escaped his lips, and often, in moments of the greatest suffering (which was subsequently proved to have exceeded what his physicians had reason to suspect) he testified his grateful sense of the care and attention of all who approached him, and his regret that he should be the cause

of imposing on them the duty of so much painful attendance.
At no period, from the commencement of his attack, had His Majesty been insensible to his critical state; but when he alluded to the subject, it was evident that any anxiety which he felt arose less from present apprehension than from solicitude for the Country, and from a long contemplation of the embarrassment into which it might be thrown by his early dissolution. It was to such reflections as these that His Majesty gave expression on the Morning of the 12th when he observed to the Queen "I have had some quiet sleep; come and pray with me, and thank the Almighty for it." His Majesty

joined in this act of heartfelt devotion, and when the King had ceased, said "And shall I not pray to the Almighty that you may have a good day?" To which His Majesty replied "Oh, No!, I wish I could live ten years, for the sake of the country, I feel it my duty to keep well as long as I can." On the Morning of Tuesday, 11th grateful for the blessings of some refreshing rest which he had enjoyed, His Majesty's Mind was impressed with the most pure devotional feelings. Seeing Lady Mary Fox occupied with a book, he enquired what she was reading, and being told it was a Prayer Book, his Countenance beamed with pleasure but he said nothing. After a considerable

lapse of time, the Queen asked whether it would be agreable to him if She read the Prayers to him. His Majesty answered "O yes! I should like it very much, but it will fatigue you." He then desired to be informed who preached that Morning in the Chapel of the Castle, and when Lady Mary Fox had ascertained, and told him it was Mr. Wood who preached, he desired that he might be sent for. When Mr. Wood entered the room, the King said, "I will thank you, my dear Sir, to read all the Prayers till you come to the Church Militant." By which words His Majesty intended to include the Communion Service, and all the other parts of the Liturgy used in

the celebration of public worship. It was equally an affecting and instructive lesson to observe the devout humility of His Majesty, frequently dwelling, as could be perceived from his manner, and the intonation of his voice, on every passage which bore even the most remote application to his own circumstances. His mind seemed quite absorbed in the duty in which he was engaged, and to rise for a time superior to his bodily infirmities; for during the whole service his attention was undisturbed, and he experienced none of those fits of coughing, and oppression which for some days past had formed an almost uninterrupted characteristic of his complaint. As Mr Wood

withdrew, His Majesty graciously expressed his thanks, and afterwards said to the Queen, "It has been a great comfort to me." Nor was this a transitory feeling. To this pure and scriptural source of spiritual consolation His Majesty believed with unfeigned gratitude; and on each day of the ensuing week did Lord Augustus Fitzclarence receive the King's command to read to him the prayers of the Morning or Evening Service. On one occasion, when His Majesty was much reduced and wearied, the Queen, fearful of causing any fatigue to him, inquired hesitatingly, Whether, unwell as he was, he should still like to have the prayers read to him. He replied

"Yes! beyond every thing". Though very languid and disposed to sleep, from the effects of medicine, His Majesty repeated all the prayers.

The fatal progress of the Kings complaint was very visible during the three following days. Nevertheless on Tuesday the 13th His Majesty gave audience to his Hanoverian Minister Baron Hugstedt, whom, contrary to the suggestion of his attendants, he had specially summoned on business connected with that Kingdom, in the welfare of which he had never ceased to feel a truly paternal interest.

On Wednesday the 14th His Majesty received a visit from the Duke of Cumberland.

The Kings attention to his religious duties, and the great comfort which

was inspired by their performance, have already been referred to. It will therefore create no surprise that His Majesty joyfully assented to the Queen's suggestion, that he should receive the Sacrament, or that, he at once named the Archbishop of Canterbury as the person whom he wished to administer that holy rite. Sunday was the day fixed by the King for the discharge of this solemn duty: and a message was accordingly sent to His Grace, desiring his presence at Windsor Castle on the evening Saturday. The two intervening days were a period of great suffering to the King, whose illness more than once in that interval assumed a most alarming form, and in the

blessing of Friday excited apprehensions of His Majesty's immediate dissolution. The next Morning however, the King felt easier, and the most urgent symptoms had disappeared. In the usual course of business with Sir A. Taylor, he signed two public documents, though not without difficulty; but on every subject which was brought to him, His Majesty's power of perception was quick and accurate, and he anticipated with pleasure, and thankfulness the approaching sacred duty of the Morrow.

On the Morning of Sunday the 18th though His Majesty's mental energies remained vigorous and unimpaired, a greater degree of bodily weakness was perceptible. He raised himself

in the Chair with greater difficulty, than the day before, and required more aid and support in every movement. The expression of his countenance however, was perhaps more satisfactory. He transacted some business with Sir H. Taylor, and affixed his signature to four documents — two appointments of Colonial Judges, and a free pardon to a condemned criminal. This was His Majesty's last act of Sovereignty. Increasing debility prevented the repetition of a similar exertion, and thus, in the closing scene of his life, was beautifully and practically exemplified by an act of mercy, that spirit of benevolence and forgiveness which shone with such peculiar lustre in His Majesty's character,

and was so strongly reflected in the uniform tenour of his reign. It had been arranged, as has been already remarked that the King should on this occasion receive the sacrament from the hands of the Archbishop of Canterbury; and when Sir A. Taylor left the room, it appeared to the Queen that the most favourable time had arrived.

The Physicians, however, suggested to her Majesty the expediency of deferring the ceremony till the King should have in some degree recovered from his fatigue; but his Majesty had already experienced the blessed consolations of religion, and removed the doubts which his anxious attendants were entertaining, by eagerly desiring the Queen to send

for the Archbishop: seeming as it were, anxious to satisfy the Bishops of his earthly, by the performance of his Spiritual Duties. His Grace promptly attended, attired in his robes, and at a quarter to eleven administered the Sacrament to His Majesty and the Queen: Lady Mary Fox communicated at the same time. The King was quite clear, and he paid the greatest attention to the Service, following it in the Prayer Book which lay on the table before him. His voice, indeed, failed, but his humble demeanour and uplifted eyes gave expression to the feelings of devotion and of gratitude to the Almighty which his faltering lips refused to utter. The performance

of this act of religion, and this public attestation of his communion with that Church, for the welfare and prosperity of which he had more than once during his illness ejaculated, short but fervent prayers, was was the source of great and manifest comfort to His Majesty. Though the shortest form had been adopted by the Archbishop, His Majesty was, nevertheless, rather exhausted by the devotion of the ceremony: but as His Grace retired, the King said, with that peculiar kindness of manner by which he was so much distinguished, and at the same time gently waving his hand, and inclining his head, "God bless you — a thousand, thousand thanks!" —

There cannot be more certain

evidence of the inward strength and satisfaction which the King derived from the office of religion than that in spite of great physical exhaustion, His Majesty, after the lapse of an hour, again requested the attendance of the Archbishop, who in compliance with the wishes of the Queen, read the Prayers for the Evening Service, with the happiest effect on the Kings spirits. This being done the Archbishop, naturally fearing the consequences of so much mental exertion on His Majesty's debilitated frame was about to retire, when the King motioned to him to sit down at the table, on the opposite side of which he himself was seated.

His Majesty was too weak to hold any

conversation, but his spirits seemed soothed and comforted by the presence of the Archbishop, on whose venerable and benign countenance His Majesty's eyes rested with real pleasure. The King at this interview stretched his hand across the table, and taking that of the Archbishop's pressed it fervently, saying, in a tone of voice which was audible only to the Queen, who was seated near to His Majesty, "I am sure the Archbishop is one of those persons who pray for me." The expression of this day is still further diminution of His Majesty's strength, but in proportion to the decay of his bodily powers was the increase of his spiritual hope and consolation.

At nine o'clock in the evening, the

Archbishop was again summoned by His Majesty's desire. The King was now still less able to converse than at the last occasion; but his Grace remained more than three quarters of an hour, supplying by his presence the same comfort to the King, and receiving from His Majesty the same silent though expressive proofs of his satisfaction and gratitude. At last on the suggestion of the Queen, that it was already late, the Archbishop might become fatigued, the King immediately signified his desire that he should retire, and crossing his hands upon his breast, and inclining his head, said, as his Grace left the room "God bless thee, dear excellent, worthy Man! a thousand, thousand thanks."

The whole course of His Majesty's

which affords abundant proofs, not only of his composure, his patience, and his resignation but that even when under the pressure of great pain and suffering, his Mind far from being absorbed with the sad circumstances of his own situation, was often dwelling on subjects connected either with the affairs of the country, or with the comfort and convenience of individuals. His Majesty rose this Morning with the recollection that this was the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. As early as half past eight, he alluded to the circumstance, and said to Dr. Chambers "Let me but live over this Memorable day, I shall never live to see another Sunset."

Dr. Chambers said, "I hope your Majesty may live to see Many." To which His Majesty replied in a pleasant manner which

he commonly employed, but the peculiar force of which those only who had the honour of being frequently admitted into His Majesty's society can fully appreciate "O! that is quite another thing." (It was usually employed by His Majesty to express his dissent, or incredulity with regard to any subject under discussion.) A splendid entertainment, as is well known, has always been given on this day to the Officers engaged in that glorious action, and since his accession to the throne His Majesty had himself honoured it with his presence. Under the present circumstances, the Duke of Wellington, naturally feeling unwilling to promote any scene of festivity, had sent Mr Greville to request the Kings

command, or at least to ascertain the wishes and opinion of the Queen.

Previous to the flag (annually presented by his Grace) being deposited in the guard chamber, it had been brought to His Majesty, who laying his hand upon it, and touching the Eagle said "I am glad to see it, tell the Duke of Wellington that I desire the dinner may take place tomorrow. I hope it will be an agreeable one." In the course of the night the Queen observed to His Majesty, that the Archbishop had only been invited to stay till the following day — that his Grace wished to be honoured with His commands — and that he had expressed himself not only willing, but anxious to remain as long as his services could be either acceptable or useful to him.

The King immediately said, "Yes; tell him to stay. It will be the greatest blessing of God to hear that beautiful Service read by him once more;" alluding to the Liturgy of the Church of England, from the frequent use of the prayers of which His Majesty had been so much comforted and supported in his illness. Monday, June 19th. Though His Majesty passed a tolerable tranquil night, yet no corresponding effect has produced upon his health. Decaying nature could no longer be recruited by ordinary sources of strength and sustenance. His Majesty, however, rose at seven for he had at no time during his illness been confined to his bed, and had been for some time during his illness

been confined to his bed, and had been for some weeks anticipated by an hour his usual time of rising. There was much in the King's language and manner this morning, which bespoke his sense of approaching death. On awaking, he observed to the Queen, "I shall get up once more to do the business of the country;" and then wheeled in his chair from his bed room to his dressing room. He turned round, and looking with a benign and gracious smile on the Queen's attendants, who were standing in tears near the door, said, "God bless you!" and waved his hand. At nine o'clock, by desire of the Queen, who was naturally anxious that the hope so fervently expressed by the King on

the preceding night might be gratified as soon as possible, the Archbishop entered the Kings room, and was received, as at all other times, with the significant tokens of joy and thankfulness, which his Grace's presence never failed to call forth. On this occasion the Archbishop read the Service for the Visitation of the Sick.

The King was seated, as usual, in his easy chair, the Queen affectionately kneeling by his side, making the responses, and assisting Him to turn over the leaves of the large Prayer Book, which was placed before Him.

Though unable to join audibly in the responses which occur in the Service, yet, when the Archbishop had rehearsed the articles of our

Creed, His Majesty, in fulness of his faith, and labouring to collect all the energies of sinking nature, enunciated with distinct and solemn emphasis the words, "All this I steadfastly believe."

During the whole service His Majesty retained hold of the Queen's hand, and in the absence of physical strength to give utterance to his feelings, signified by his fervent pressure of it, not only his humble acquiescence in the doctrines of our holy faith, but his grateful acknowledgements of those promises of grace and mercy which so many passages of this affecting portion of the Liturgy hold out to the dying Christian, and the belief of which His Majesty so thankfully appreciated in this his hour of need. With the

other hand His Majesty frequently covered his eyes and knitted his brow, as if to concentrate all his powers of devotion, and to restrain the warmer emotions of his heart, which were so painful excited by the distress of those who surrounded him. His Majesty did not allow the Archbishop to withdraw without the usual significant expression of his gratitude, "A thousand, thousand thanks." It was when the Archbishop pronounced the solemn and lively affecting form of blessing contained in the Service for the Visitation of the Sick, that the Queen for the first time in His Majesty's apartment was overpowered by the weight of her affliction. The King observed

her emotion, and said, in a tone of kind emotion, and in a tone of kind encouragement, "Bear up — bear up." — At the conclusion of the prayers His Majesty saw all his Children, and as they successively knelt to kiss his hand, gave them his blessing in the most affectionate terms, and suitable to the character and circumstances of each. They had all manifested to His Majesty during his illness the most truly filial affection; but on Lady Mary Fox, the eldest of His Majesty's surviving daughters had chiefly devolved the painful duty of assisting the Queen in her attendance on the King. The extreme caution of His Majesty, and his anxiety to avoid causing any pain, or alarm

to the Queen, was very remarkable. He never alluded in distinct terms to his death in Her Majesty's presence.

It was about this period His Majesty tenderly besought the Queen not to make herself uneasy about him; but that he was already anticipating his speedy dissolution, was evident from his expressions to several of his relatives. Even at this advanced stage of his disease, and under circumstances of the most distressing debility, the King had never wholly intermitted his attention to public business. In accordance with his usual habits, he had this morning frequently desired to be told when the clock struck half past ten, about which time his

Majesty uniformly gave audience to Sir H. Taylor. At eleven, when Sir Herbert was announced, the King said, "Give me your hand for many years" the King had discontinued giving his hand familiarly to anyone, and from this deviation from his usual practice Sir Herbert inferred that his Majesty intended to take leave of him & now get things ready. On Sir Herbert saying that he had no papers today, His Majesty appeared surprised, till Sir Herbert said, "It is Monday Sire" - When he replied "Ah true - I had forgot" - The Queen then named Sir Henry Wheatley who had entered the apartment. The King regarded him with a gracious look, and extended his hand to him, as

He did also to Dr. Davies, evidently influenced by the same motive which had prompted a similar action to Sir Robert Taylor — a last acknowledgement of their faithful services. His Majesty there passed several hours in a state of uneasy slumber; the Queen almost uninterruptedly kneeling by his side, and gently chafing his hand, from which assurance of her presence His Majesty derived the greatest comfort. During the afternoon, to such an extremity of weakness was the King reduced that he scarcely opened his eyes, save to raise them in prayer to Heaven, with a look expressive of the most perfect resignation. Once or twice unclosed his feelings

found expression in the words "Thy will be done" and on the occasion he was heard to pronounce the words, "The Church — the Church!" and the name of the Archbishop. It was about nine o'clock in the evening of this day that the Archbishop visited the King for the last time. His Majesty's state altogether incapacitated him from devotion; but, as at each preceding interview, His Grace's presence proved a source of joy and consolation to the dying Monarch, who strove his utmost to convey any audible acknowledgement of the blessings which he sensibly enjoyed; but when on leaving the room the Archbishop said, "My best prayers are offered up for your Majesty" the King replied, with slow and feeble

yet distinct utterance "Believe me I am a religious Man". After this exertion, His Majesty gently waved his hand in token of his last farewell, and the Archbishop withdrew. As the Night advanced, a more rapid diminution of His Majesty's vital powers was perceptible. His weakness now rendered it impracticable to remove him into his usual bed room, and a bed was accordingly prepared in the Royal Closet, which communicated with the apartment in which His Majesty had past the last ten days of his life. At half past ten, the King was seized with a fainting fit, the effects of which were mistaken by many for the stroke of death. However, His Majesty gradually, though imperfectly,

received, and was then removed into bed. From this time his voice was not heard, except to pronounce the name of his Valet. In less than an hour His Majesty expired, without a struggle, and without a groan; the Queen kneeling at the bedside, and still affectionately holding his hand, the comfortable warmth of which rendered her unwilling to believe the reality of the sad event.

Thus expired in the 73rd year of his age, in firm reliance on the merits of his Redeemer, King William the Fourth, a just and upright King, a forgiving enemy, a sincere friend and a most gracious & indulgent Master.

J. H. W—

Bushy Park
July 14th 1837

Death of