Her reign was the longest of any female monarch in history. As Queen, her land entered a time that saw progress and growth in nearly every aspect of society. From industry and science to culture and politics, her rule ushered in an era that would later bear her name, Victoria. Taking the throne at the age of eighteen and ruling for over sixty-three years, Queen Victoria is perhaps one of the most iconic figures in the history of the British Monarchy.

Under Victoria, the British Empire rose to become a leading global power. One way the monarchy sought to secure political alliances came through strategic marriages between the ruling royal families. Queen Victoria became known as The Grandmother of Europe as some of her 9 children and 42 grandchildren married into royal families across the continent. It was through these marriages that Victoria not only secured political clout, but such practice was also the cause for the passing of a condition the royal monarchy often tried to hide, hemophilia. A carrier of what was recently proven to be hemophilia B, Queen Victoria inadvertently spread the condition from the United Kingdom to the royal houses of Germany, Spain and Russia. The line of princes with hemophilia in Europe led to the bleeding disorder being coined as The Royal Disease.

Though they lived lavish courtly lifestyles, life for Victoria’s descendents with hemophilia was not easy. At a time when doctors knew little about the condition, there was not much families could do for their affected children. Though great care was taken to protect the princes, unfortunately many did not live to see adulthood. The following is an account of “The Royal Disease” as found in some of the major ruling monarchies of Europe.

The United Kingdom

Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany
Prince Leopold was born April 7, 1853 at Buckingham Palace. He was Victoria’s 8th child and her only son with hemophilia. The condition caused Victoria much anxiety, prompting her to keep the prince close to her side. He was followed in permanent attendance by a number of physicians. Victoria thought it unnecessary for him to leave the home and even encouraged him not to marry or have children.

Unable to pursue a military career because of his condition, Leopold entered into the Christ Church of Oxford where he studied a wide variety of subjects. He earned an honorary law degree and went on to become a patron of the arts and literature. He also served as the unofficial secretary to his mother.

Despite the wishes of his mother, Leopold sought marriage and considered it his only hope for independence. His health condition caused some difficulty in finding a wife. After a number of rejections, Leopold eventually married Princess Helene Friederike, a member of the German royal family. Though their marriage was brief, the couple was happy and gave birth to a daughter, Alice, Countess of Athlone, and a son, Charles Edward.

Because of joint pain associated with his hemophilia, the winter
months were always difficult for Leopold. In February 1884, while his wife was still pregnant with Charles Edward, Leopold was encouraged by his physician to spend some time in the warmer climate of Cannes, France. Just weeks later on March 27, Leopold suffered a fall at a yacht club in Cannes and injured his knee. He passed away early the next morning from a combination of internal bleeding and a fatal mixture of the pain medications he received.

**Prince Rupert of Teck**

Born on April 24, 1907, Prince Rupert was the son of Princess Alice, Leopold’s daughter. Rupert was a studious young man and attended Eton and Trinity Colleges at Cambridge University. On April 15, 1928, while traveling in Bellevue-sur-Saone, France, Rupert was in a car accident. Five days later, just four days before his 21st birthday, Rupert died of a brain hemorrhage.

Hemophilia in the royal family did not end with the princes most closely tied to the British Royal Family. Queen Victoria’s daughters, Princess Beatrice and Princess Alice, would later prove to also be carriers of the condition, and would pass the disorder to other ruling families in Europe.

**Germany**

Hemophilia found its way to the German Empire with the marriages of Queen Victoria’s daughters, Princess Beatrice and Princess Alice, to German suitors. Beatrice had two boys with the condition, Leopold and Maurice. Princess Alice had six children to include one son with hemophilia, Prince Frederick, and two daughters that were carriers of hemophilia, Princess Irene and Princess Alice. Irene would go on to have two children with the disorder, Prince Waldemar and Prince Henry.
Prince Leopold Mountbatten
Prince Leopold, the son of Princess Beatrice and Prince Henry of Battenberg, was born on May 21, 1889. He served in the King’s Royal Rifle Corps, where he attained the rank of Major. Leopold was also a member of both the Knights of the Royal Victorian Order and the Knights Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order. At the age of 32, he passed away on April 23, 1922 during a hip surgery needed as a result of his bleeding disorder.

Prince Maurice of Battenberg
Prince Maurice, the youngest son of Beatrice and Henry, and Prince Leopold’s brother, was born on October 3, 1891. Educated at Lockers Park Prep School, Maurice went on to attend the well-known Wellington College. Like his brother, Maurice volunteered in the King’s Royal Rifle Corps. As a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order and as a Lieutenant in the rifle corps, Maurice served bravely in World War I. He was mortally wounded by shrapnel at the First Battle of Ypres in 1914 and died on the battlefield.

Prince Friedrich of Hess
Prince Friedrich was born to Princess Alice, the daughter of Queen Victoria, on October 7, 1870. The grandson of the queen, Friedrich or Frittie as the family often called him, was an active, cheerful child. He was diagnosed with hemophilia in February of 1873 after a cut on his ear bled for three days. Three months later while playing with his younger brother, Frittie climbed onto a chair in his mother’s bedroom to get a better view from a window. He fell through the window after accidentally tipping the chair. Though he survived the twenty foot drop, he died hours later from a brain hemorrhage. His mother, Princess Alice never recovered from her loss.

Prince Waldemar of Prussia
Irene, the daughter of Princess Alice, gave birth to Prince Waldemar of Prussia on March 20, 1889. The family was devastated that the “Royal Disease” had shown up in the ruling Prussian family. Although the condition caused Irene much anxiety with regards to her son’s health, unlike many of his relatives, Waldemar lived into his fifties. He married Princess Calixta of Lippe on August 14, 1919. Though they had a happy marriage, they decided against having children. Waldemar lived to see a time when treatment for hemophilia saw some improvement. Doctors discovered that an infusion of blood from a healthy patient could help stop the bleeding in people with hemophilia. As such, Waldemar received infusions to control his bleeding episodes. During World War II, as he fled the Russian advance with his wife, the couple found themselves in Tutzing, Bavaria. Not long after arriving in the city, the American Army took control of the area and sent all the available medical resources to treat victims in the concentration camp. Without access to blood transfusions, Waldemar passed away on May 2, 1945 in Bavaria.

Prince Heinrich of Prussia
Waldemar’s younger brother, Prince Heinrich was born on January 9, 1900. The entire family was devastated, especially his mother, Irene, when Heinrich died after falling and bumping his head. He lived to be just four years old, passing away February 26, 1904.
Russia

Princess Alice had another daughter, Alexandra of Hesse who married Tsar Nicholas the II of Russia. They would go on to have five children, one of them considered to be one of the most famous of all the royals with hemophilia, Tsarevich Nikolaevich Alexei, the great grandson of Queen Victoria.

Tsarevich Nikolaevich Alexei

It was an extremely joyous occasion for the Romanov family when Alexei was born on August 12, 1904. Being the youngest of the family, and the only son, Alexei was in line to be the next Tsar and leader of the Russian Empire. As the only male heir to the throne, the family was devastated when it was discovered that Alexei had hemophilia.

From a young age, Alexei was very energetic, though he was ordered not to play too roughly and was prohibited from such activities as riding a bicycle. As a child, Alexei was prone to mischief and he was known to play pranks on guests of the house. His parents had to appoint two sailors from the Imperial Navy to watch over Alexei and keep him out of trouble, which they were not always able to do.

Alexei was the center of all attention in his family. When he suffered bleeding episodes, the entire house suffered with him. He was prone to weeks in bed and often had to wear a heavy iron brace. Alexandra and Nicholas devoted much of their time and energy to seeing that Alexei was taken care of. They came to rely on the services of Rasputin, a monk who was able to help Alexei through his painful bleeding episodes. Nobody knows exactly how Rasputin was able to “heal” the young Tsarevich. It is speculated that he used some combination of hypnosis, herbs, or as some believe “supernatural healing powers” to aide Alexei in times of need.

Alexei’s hemophilia often took his parents’ attention away from governing. Their reliance and close connections with Rasputin spurred much gossip and discontent. The country was already plagued with political and social unrest. A series of bloody revolutions took place that would ultimately put the communist Bolsheviks in power. Arrested in the Russian Revolution of 1917, Alexei and his family were forced to live for some time as captives. Tragically, in July of 1918, the family was systematically executed by the Bolsheviks to ensure that a counter-revolution could not rally around the former rulers of Russia. Alexei and his family were eventually canonized as “passion bearers” in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

Spain

Hemophilia would find its way into the ruling royal Spanish family by Victoria Eugenie, who was daughter of Princess Beatrice and granddaughter of Queen Victoria. Victoria Eugenie would become Queen of Spain when she married King Alfonso. Of their four sons, two of them (including the heir to the throne) would be diagnosed with hemophilia. The King and Queen of Spain were reported to have an unhappy marriage. The King took many mistresses and reportedly never forgave the Queen for bringing the bleeding disorder into the royal bloodline.

Alfonso, Prince of Asturias

Queen Victoria’s great grandson, Alfonso was born on May 10, 1907 and was the heir to the throne of Spain. When it was found he had hemophilia, he (and later his brother, Infante Gonzalo) wore specially tailored jackets to try to help prevent bleeding episodes. Political upheaval left the monarchy in Spain largely defunct as the country moved to become a republic. Alfonso renounced his rights to the throne and married a commoner. He would later divorce, remarry, divorce again, and then father a child out of wedlock.
In 1938 at the age of 31, while driving in Miami, Florida, Alfonso crashed into a telephone booth. Though his injuries were minor at the time, he suffered fatal internal bleeding and later passed away. He was initially buried in Miami, but was later moved to The Pantheon of the Princes in El Escorial, Spain.

**Infante Gonzalo of Spain**

Born October 24, 1914, another great grandson of Queen Victoria, Infante Gonzalo was the youngest of King Alfonso and Queen Eugenie’s children. When he was baptized, the final name in his title “Mauricio” was in honor of Prince Maurice, his uncle with hemophilia that was killed in World War I. Gonzalo was an avid sportsman and also held Private rank in the Spanish Army, though he did suffer ill health because of his condition. While spending summer holiday with family in Austria, Gonzalo was driving with his sister. In an attempt to avoid hitting a cyclist, the siblings crashed into a wall. Similar to his brother who would perish in a car accident four years later, Gonzalo suffered no obvious injury immediately following the accident. Hours later, it was discovered that Gonzalo was hemorrhaging into his abdomen. He died a few days later.

One day, Olga, Tsarevich Alexei’s sister, found the ten-year old prince gazing up at the sky. When she asked what he was doing he replied, “I like to think and wonder… I enjoy the sun and the beauty of summer as long as I can. Who knows whether one of these days I shall be prevented from doing it.” The princes afflicted with “The Royal Disease” faced struggles largely unknown to our community today.

Though the ruling monarchies of Europe often attempted at every level to minimize the appearance of hemophilia in their families to the public; privately, great measures were taken to learn about and treat the disorder. They commissioned the finest physicians of the time to attend to their children. Increased attention from physicians brought interest and new literature regarding the condition. The late 1800s saw a huge increase in the amount of publications focused on hemophilia, shedding light and paving the way for future physicians to advance treatment. Though their struggles were great, the status of the princes with hemophilia helped advance research and bring attention to “The Royal Disease.”

It is speculated that treatment for hemophilia would not have advanced as quickly as it did were it not for the royal princes who suffered from the condition. Their stories are compelling and prompt us as young Alexei to think and wonder...