

**LIFE OF HER
MAJESTY
QUEEN VICTORIA.**

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Table of Contents

PREFACE.

VICTORIA.

CHAPTER I. THE QUEEN'S IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS.

CHAPTER II. CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION.

CHAPTER III. ACCESSION TO THE THRONE.

CHAPTER IV. LOVE AND POLITICS.

CHAPTER V. ROCKS AHEAD.

CHAPTER VI. THE PRINCE.

CHAPTER VII. THE QUEEN AND PEEL.

CHAPTER VIII. STOCKMAR.

CHAPTER IX. THE NURSERY.

CHAPTER X. HOME LIFE.—OSBORNE AND BALMORAL.

CHAPTER XI. FORTY-THREE TO FORTY-EIGHT.

CHAPTER XII. PALMERSTON.

CHAPTER XIII. PEACE AND WAR.

CHAPTER XIV. A NATION OF SHOPKEEPERS.

CHAPTER XV. THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

CHAPTER XVI. DOMESTIC LIFE AFTER 1861.

CHAPTER XVII. THE WARP AND WOOF OF HOME AND POLITICS.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE QUEEN AND THE EMPIRE.

PREFACE.

It would have been impossible, within the limits of this little book, to narrate, even in barest outline, all the events of the Queen's long life and reign. In attempting to deal with so large a subject in so short a space, I have therefore thought it best to dwell on what may be considered the formative influences on the Queen's character in her early life, and in later years to refer only to political and personal events, in so far as they illustrate her character and her conception of her political functions. Even with this limitation, I am fully aware how far short I have come of being able to produce a worthy record of a noble life. I will only add that I began this little book with a feeling towards Her Majesty of sincere veneration and gratitude, and that this feeling has been deepened by studying more closely than I had done before the ideal place of the Crown in the English Constitution, as a power above party, and the important part the Queen has taken now for nearly sixty years in making this ideal a reality. It is not too much to say that, by her sagacity and persistent devotion to duty, she has created modern constitutionalism, and more than any other single person has made England and the English monarchy what they now are.

A list of the books referred to will be found after the chronological table. Among them it is almost unnecessary to say that I am especially indebted to "The Early Years of the Prince Consort," by General Grey, and to "The Life of the Prince Consort," by Sir Theodore Martin. I also desire to express my

respectful thanks to H. R. H. Princess Christian, for help very graciously and kindly given in the selection of a portrait for this little volume.

MILLICENT GARRETT FAWCETT.

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VICTORIA.



HER MAJESTY, QUEEN VICTORIA.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUEEN'S IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS.

Every now and then, on the birth of a male heir to any of the great historic kingdoms of Europe, the newspapers and the makers of public speeches break forth into rejoicing and thanksgiving that the country in question is secured from all the perils and evils supposed to be associated with the reign of a female Sovereign. It is of little importance, perhaps, that this attitude of mind conveys but a poor compliment to our Queen and other living Queens and Queen Regents; but it is not a little curious that the popular opinion to which these articles and speeches give expression, namely, that the chances are that any man will make a better Sovereign than any woman, is wholly contrary to experience; it is hardly going too far to say that in every country in which the succession to the Crown has been open to women, some of the greatest, most capable, and most patriotic Sovereigns have been queens. The names of Isabella of Spain, of Maria Theresa of Austria, will rise in this connection to every mind; and, little as she is to be admired as a woman, Catherine II. of Russia showed that she thoroughly understood the art of reigning. Her vices would have excited little remark had she been a king instead of a queen. It is an unconscious tribute to the higher standard of conduct queens have taught the world to expect from them, that while the historic muse stands aghast at the private life of the Russian Empress, she is only very mildly scandalized by a Charles V. or

a Henry IV., thinking, with much justice, that their great qualities as rulers serve to cover their multitude of sins as private individuals. The brief which history could produce on behalf of Queens, as successful rulers, can be argued also from the negative side. The Salic law did not, to say the least, save the French monarchy from ruin. How far the overthrow of that monarchy was due to a combination of incompetence and depravity in various proportions in the descendants of the Capets from the Regent Orleans onwards towards the Revolution, is a question which must be decided by others. Carlyle's view of the cause of the Revolution was that it was due to "every scoundrel that had lived, and, quack-like, pretended to be doing, and had only been eating and misdoing, in all provinces of life, as shoeblack or as sovereign lord, each in his degree, from the time of Charlemagne and earlier." Women no doubt produced their share of quacks and charlatans in the humble ranks of this long procession of misdoers, but not as sovereigns, because, with the superior logic of the Gallic mind, the French people not only believed the accession of a woman to the throne to be a misfortune, but guarded themselves against the calamity by the Salic law. The fact affords a fresh proof that logic is a poor thing to be ruled by, because of the liability, which cannot be eliminated from human affairs, of making a mistake in the premises. The English plan, though less logical, is more practically successful. We speak and write as if a nation could not suffer a greater misfortune than to have a woman at the head of the State; but we do nothing to bar the female succession, with the result that out of our five Queens Regnant we have had three of eminent distinction as compared with any other Sovereign; and of these

three, one ranks with the very greatest of the statesmen who deserve to be remembered as the Makers of England.

Something more can be claimed than that the Salic law did not prevent the overthrow of the French monarchy. It is probable that the female succession to the throne did save the English monarchy in 1837. Failing the Queen, the next heir would have been the Duke of Cumberland, and from all the records of the time, it does not suffice to say that he was unpopular, he was simply hated,—and with justice. He appears to have conceived it to be his function in Hanover “to cut the wings of the democracy;” if he had succeeded to the English throne and adopted the same policy here, he would have brought the whole fabric of the monarchy about his ears. He was equally without private and public virtues. The Duke of Wellington once asked George IV. why the Duke of Cumberland was so unpopular. The King replied, “Because there never was a father well with his son, or husband with his wife, or lover with his mistress, or friend with his friend, that he did not try to make mischief between them.”

The political power which has in various countries devolved on queens calls to mind one thing that ought to be remembered in discussions upon the hereditary principle in government. Within its own prescribed limitations it applies the democratic maxim, *la carrière ouverte aux talents*, much more completely than any nominally democratic form of government, and thus has repeatedly given, in our own history, a chance to an able woman to prove that in statesmanship, courage, sense of responsibility, and devotion to duty, she is capable of ruling in

such a way as to strengthen her empire and throne by carrying the devoted affection of all classes of her subjects.

Twice in the history of England have extraordinary efforts been made to avert the supposed misfortune of a female heir to the throne; and twice has the "divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will," decreed that these efforts should be in vain, and the dreaded national misfortune has turned out to be a great national blessing. Mr. Froude tells us that five out of Henry VIII.'s six marriages were contracted in consequence of his patriotic desire to secure the succession to the throne in the male line. But when the feeble flame of Edward VI.'s life was extinguished, four women stood next in the succession, and England acquired at a most critical moment of her history, in the person of Elizabeth, perhaps the greatest Sovereign who has ever occupied the throne of this country.

The second occasion was after the death of the Princess Charlotte in 1817. George III., with his fifteen children, had not then a single heir in the second generation. It would not be correct to say that the Royal Dukes were then married by Act of Parliament, no Act of Parliament was necessary; but political pressure was brought on them to marry, and Parliament granted them extra allowances of sums varying from £10,000 to £6,000 a year, and in May and June, 1818, the marriages took place of the Duke of Cambridge to the Princess Augusta of Hesse, of the Duke of Clarence (afterwards William IV.) to Princess Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen, and of the Duke of Kent to Princess Victoria, daughter of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg, widow of the Prince of Leiningen, and sister of Prince Leopold, the husband of Princess Charlotte. The marriage of the Duke of

Kent is the only one of these that immediately concerns us. As the fourth son of George III., his children would, under ordinary circumstances, have had but a remote prospect of succeeding to the throne. But of his elder brothers, the Prince Regent had, in consequence of the death of Princess Charlotte, become childless, the Duke of York was also childless, the Duke of Clarence, whose marriage was contracted on the same day as that of the Duke of Kent, 13th June, 1818, took precedence of him as an elder brother, and if he had had legitimate heirs they would have succeeded to the throne. The Princess (afterwards Queen) Adelaide was not childless. She bore two children, but they died in their infancy; and thus the only child of the Duke and Duchess of Kent, the Princess Alexandrina Victoria, became heiress-presumptive of the English throne. The Duke of Kent took the strongest interest in his baby girl's chances of the succession. Before the birth of the child he urged upon his wife, who was then resident at Amorbach in Bavaria, that the possible future King or Queen of England ought to be born on English soil, and then she consented to remove to Kensington; it is said he was so keenly anxious for her safety that he drove her carriage the whole of the land journey between Amorbach and Kensington with his own hands. At the present day we should perhaps say that the chances of safety lay with the professional rather than with the amateur coachman; but the Duke proved his efficiency in handling the reins, and brought his wife in safety to London, where, on the 24th May, 1819, the baby was born who is now Queen of England. It should be noted that the Duchess was attended in her confinement by a woman, following the custom of her own country in this matter, and that the same *accoucheuse*, Madam Charlotte Siebold,

attended a few months later upon the Duchess of Coburg when she gave birth to the child who in after years became Prince Consort. There are several little anecdotes which illustrate the Duke of Kent's appreciation of the important place his little girl was born to fill. He wanted the baby to be called Elizabeth, because it was the name of the greatest of England's Queens, and therefore a popular name with the English people; there were, however, godfathers, Royal and Imperial, who overruled him as to the naming of the child. These were the Emperor of Russia (Alexander I.) and the Prince Regent, and it was therefore proposed to call the baby, Alexandrina Georgiana. But George, Prince Regent, objected to his name standing second to any other, however distinguished. His brother, on the other hand, insisted that Alexandrina should be the first of the baby's names. In consequence of this dispute the little Princess was so fortunate as to escape bearing the name of Georgiana at all; when she was handed to the Archbishop at the font the Prince Regent only gave the name of Alexandrina. The baby's father, however, intervened, and requested that another name might be added, with the result that, as a kind of afterthought, her mother's name was, as it were, thrown in, and the little Princess was christened Alexandrina Victoria. It was in this way that the name Victoria, then almost unknown in England, was given to the baby, and has since become familiar in our mouths as household words. The Duke declined to allow the congratulations that were showered on him at the birth of his child to be tempered by regrets that the daughter was not a son. In reply to a letter conceived in this vein from his chaplain, Dr. Prince, the Duke wrote at the same time that "I assure you how truly sensible I am of the kind and flattering

intentions of those who are prompted to express a degree of disappointment from the circumstance of the child not proving to be a son instead of a daughter. I feel it due to myself to declare that such sentiments are not in unison with my own, for I am decidedly of opinion that the decrees of Providence are at all times wisest and best." As this was addressed to a clergyman and a Doctor of Divinity, it may be inferred that Her Majesty's father was not without a sense of humor. Another story of the Duke is that, playing with his baby when she was a few months old, he held her high in his arms and said, "Look at her well, for she will be the Queen of England." It must be remembered, however, that at this time there was no certainty that the children of the Duke and Duchess of Clarence would not survive the perils of infancy; moreover, if the Duke of Kent had lived to have a son, the boy would have become the heir in preference to his sister. The Duke's strongly marked feeling of fatherly pride and affection is almost the only trait in his character by which we are able at this distance of time to conjure him up out of the mists of bygone years.^[1] This feeling was soon to receive a melancholy illustration. The Duke and Duchess, with their baby daughter, removed from Kensington to Sidmouth to spend the winter of 1819-20. Returning home on a January day, with boots wet with snow, the Duke caught a severe chill from playing with his baby, instead of changing his boots.^[2] The illness developed into acute pneumonia, of which he died in January, 1820, leaving his wife a stranger in a strange land, hardly able to speak the English language, sole guardian of England's future Queen. The Duchess of Kent must have been a woman of considerable strength of character and power of will. She was in an extremely lonely and difficult

position. Pecuniarily, her chief legacy from her husband consisted of his debts, which the allowance made then by Parliament was not sufficiently ample to enable her to pay.

Her brother, then Prince Leopold, widower of Princess Charlotte, and afterwards King of the Belgians, supplemented her income from his own purse. The Duchess and her children (she had two by her first marriage) were frequently his guests at Claremont and elsewhere, and the Queen speaks of these visits as the happiest periods of her childhood. After a few years the death of the children of the Duke and Duchess of Clarence made it practically certain that the Princess Victoria would become Queen. The Court of George IV. was not one which the Duchess of Kent could frequent with any satisfaction; she was on bad terms with him, and he often threatened to take her child away from her. His character made him quite capable of doing this; he was equally heartless and despotic. Matters were not greatly improved as to personal relations between the Sovereign and herself when William IV. became King; the Princess Victoria did not even attend his coronation. There was a strong feeling of antagonism between the Duchess of Kent and William IV., which occasionally broke out into very unseemly manifestations, especially on the King's side. His was not a character which could claim respect, and still less evoke enthusiasm. As Duke of Clarence, he had lived for more than twenty years with Mrs. Jordan, the actress, by whom he had ten sons and daughters. His affection for them showed the best side of his character. He did not disown them; they bore the name of Fitz Clarence, and as soon as he was able he provided liberally for them. Greville says that his sons, with one exception, repaid his kindness with insolence and ingratitude.

His affection for them did not prevent his desertion of their mother. He separated from her without any apparent cause, and endeavored to bring about a marriage between himself and a half-crazy woman of large fortune. The Prince Regent is said to have been the main plot of this scheme, which was never carried out. During the earlier part of his connection with Mrs. Jordan, the Duke of Clarence made her an allowance of £1,000 a year. At the suggestion of George III. he is said to have proposed by letter to Mrs. Jordan to reduce this sum to £500. Her reply was to send him the bottom part of a play-bill, on which were these words, "No money returned after the rising of the curtain." When he was a young man on active service in the navy and in command of a ship, he had twice absented himself from foreign stations without leave, and the Admiralty were at their wits' end to know how to deal with him.

The death of the Princess Charlotte in 1817, and later the death of the Duke of York, gave political importance to the Duke of Clarence's existence, and he was one of the batch of Royal Dukes who married, as we have seen, in 1818, not without unseemly haggling with the House of Commons as to the additional allowance to be voted for his support. The £10,000 a year proposed by the Government was cut down to £6,000 by a vote of 193 to 184. Lord Castlereagh then rose and said that "Since the House had thought proper to refuse the larger sum to the Duke of Clarence, he believed he might say that the negotiation for the marriage might be considered at an end;" and on the next day his Lordship announced to the House that "the Duke declined availing himself of the inadequate sum which had been voted to him." However, as the only practical

reply to this was a vote by the House granting £6,000 a year to the Duke of Cambridge, and declining any grant at all for the unpopular Duke of Cumberland, the Duke of Clarence appears to have thought better of his refusal of the grant, and the marriage accordingly took place. But there can be no surprise, under the circumstances, that such a union and the character it revealed awakened no popular interest. It should be said, however, that when he became King it was generally remarked that his elevation improved him. He became, Greville says, "most composed and rational, if not more dignified in his behavior." People began to like him, if not for his virtues, at any rate on account of the contrast he presented to his predecessor. His best qualities were frankness and honesty, and he also had the real and rather rare generosity of not bearing a grudge against those who had baffled or defeated him. Thus the Duke of Wellington had, when Prime Minister, removed the Duke of Clarence from the office of Lord High Admiral; but though exceedingly angry at the time, he never bore any grudge against the Duke of Wellington, or wreaked vengeance upon him in any way when he had the power to do so. On the contrary, when he became King he gave the Duke his fullest and most cordial confidence, retained him as Prime Minister, and took an early opportunity of publicly showing him honor by dining at Apsley House. It is the more pleasant to recall this instance of magnanimity on the part of William IV. because the annals of the time are full to overflowing of stories to the discredit of nearly all the sons of George III. The character of George IV. is well known. His quarrels with his wife and attempt to pass an Act of Divorce against her are notorious. In ghastly contrast to the pageantry of his coronation, in which it

was said £240,000 were spent, those who were present speak of the thrill of horror which ran through the assembly when Queen Caroline was heard knocking at the door of the Abbey for the admittance which was refused her. "There was sudden silence and consternation; it was like the handwriting on the wall." George IV. was almost equally contemptible in every relation of life. His Ministers could with difficulty induce him to give attention to necessary business. "Indolent, cowardly, selfish, unfeeling dog" are the words by which he is described by the clerk of his Council. He delighted in keeping those who had business to transact with him waiting for hours while he was chatting about horses, or betting, or any trivial matter. Greville, after many years of close knowledge of George IV., says of him: "The littleness of his character prevents his displaying the dangerous faults that belong to great minds; but with vices and weaknesses of the lowest and most contemptible order it would be difficult to find a disposition more abundantly furnished." It is probably not too much to say that no one loved him living, or mourned him dead. Of his funeral Greville says in his cynical way: "The attendance was not very numerous, and when they had all got together in St. George's Hall, a gayer company I never beheld.... Merry were all, as merry as grigs." The King's brothers were not a very great improvement on the King. The Royal Dukes seemed to vie with each other in unseemly and indecorous behavior. On one occasion, in July, 1829, they attacked each other violently in the House of Lords, that is, "Clarence and Sussex attacked Cumberland, and he them very vehemently, and they used towards each other language which nobody else could have ventured to employ; so it was a very droll scene." With such

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