The Real Queen Victoria

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May 24, 1819 the Duchess of Kent gave birth to a beautiful healthy Princess. The Duke of Kent was very excited to have a healthy baby. After the birth, the Duke sent a letter to his mother-in-law saying; “Thank God the dear mother and the child are doing marvelously well.”¹

The Duchess of Kent was from Germany and wanted to return, but the Duke of Kent had no intention of leaving England. He believed that if their baby was to one day become Queen she should grow up in England.² The Duchess of Kent was not liked by the royal family. They believed she was too German and thought she was unintelligent because she had such a difficult time learning English and learning the English customs.³

On June 24, 1819 the Princess was christened in the Cupola Room at Kensington Palace. The night before the ceremony the Prince Regent sent a letter to the Duke of Kent saying that he did not approve of the name Georgina. The Duchess later said that at the last minute before the ceremony was to begin the Prince Regent also objected to the names Charlotte and Augusta. The Archbishop of Canterbury baptized the princess Alexandrina Victoria, but her mother called her Drina or Victoria.

One month later there was another important birth in the Duchess of Kent’s native land.⁴ The Duchess Luise wife of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Saalfeld gave birth to a boy named Albert. The Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Saalfeld and the Duke of

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¹ Cecil Woodam-Smith, Queen Victoria: From her birth to the Death of the Prince of Consort (New York:Knopf, 1972), 30.
² Ibid., 32
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., 37.
Kent were brothers. Their children were first cousins and from the time they were born it was planned for them to marry each other.\textsuperscript{5}

Nine months after the birth of Victoria, her father caught a cold and never recovered. He died on January 23, 1820. The death of the Duke of Kent shocked the world. The duke was never sick before and he was known for being very strong. The Duchess was lost without her husband and he left her with nothing but debts.\textsuperscript{6}

The Duchess of Kent had nowhere to go after her husband died. The Prince Regent said that the Duchess and the Princess could live at Kensington Palace. Six days after the death of the Duke the Duchess and Victoria arrived at Kensington Palace.\textsuperscript{7} Once they arrived the Duchess learned that the King George III had died. The Prince Regent was now on the throne as King George IV.

The Duchess found help from one of her husband’s close friends, Captain John Conroy. Conroy helped the Duchess by dealing with her financial affairs. Victoria never liked Conroy. She knew he was interested in gaining power through her. Conroy developed a plan which became known as the Kensington System. This system relied on the Princess becoming completely dependent on her mother, so if the Victoria’s uncle the Duke of Clarence died before Victoria turned 18 would become Regent. Conroy and the Duchess were very controlling over Victoria. They never let her be alone. She continued to sleep in the same room as her mother until she became Queen.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 45. 
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 47 
June 1830 King George IV, who had been ill for some time, died. As soon as word spread to the Duchess of Kent and to Conroy they started working. The Duchess sent a letter to the Prime Minister. She told him that since now Victoria was now heir apparent she needed a larger staff, better quarters, and a more generous allowance. The Duchess also demanded that she become regent for her daughter. Conroy knew that with King George IV gone the Kensington System would start to work.

September 8, 1831 the Coronation of William IV took place at Westminster Abbey. Princess Victoria was supposed to attend the coronation but was not allowed because her mother did not like where Victoria was supposed to be placed during the procession. The Duchess thought that Victoria should be placed directly behind the king; instead she was to be placed the Royal Dukes.

In 1832 Princess Victoria was sent on a series of tours so that she could be formally presented to the nation. William IV found the tours irritating calling them “Royal Progresses.” Each place they arrived at had a ceremony for the Princess with

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10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.


13 Ibid., 60.

14 Ibid., 61.


16 Ibid.

17 Smith, *Queen Victoria*, 87.
bands, flowers, and decorations.\textsuperscript{18} During this time is when Victoria began to keep a diary. Her first diary was given to her by her mother, the Duchess of Kent.\textsuperscript{19} Throughout Victoria’s life she continued to write; her journals filled more than 122 volumes.\textsuperscript{20} Sadly Queen Victoria’s Journal no longer exists. One of her daughters was appointed by the Queen to be her literary executor.\textsuperscript{21} Her daughter decided a few years after the Queen’s death that her journals were not suitable for the public to read, and had almost all of it destroyed.\textsuperscript{22}

July 30, 1835 the Princess’s Conformation took place at the Chapel Royal.\textsuperscript{23} Many of her royal relatives attended. The Princess wore a white lace dress with a rose trimmed bonnet.\textsuperscript{24} She walked in the room determined to become a true Christian. Immediately a dispute broke out that embarrassed the Princess. The King said that there were too many people in attendance and made Conroy leave the ceremony. Conroy never forgave the King for this and from then on always resented him.\textsuperscript{25} The Archbishop of Canterbury delivered a sermon that dealt with the Princess’s future responsibilities that left her in tears.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{23} Longford, \textit{Queen Victoria}, 47.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Smith, \textit{Queen Victoria}, 99.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
Eleven months later on June 30, 1837 Victoria was awoken by her mother who told her the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Conyngham (Chamberlain) were there to see her. She went to the sitting room alone and was told by the two men that her Uncle King William IV had died earlier that morning and that she was now Queen.27 After receiving the news she wrote two letters. One letter was addressed to her Uncle King Leopold and the other to her half sister Princess Feodora.28 July 13, 1837 the Queen moved from the apartment at Kensington Palace into her new home at Buckingham Palace. During the Queen’s first year reigning she experienced many new experiences like sitting on the throne and going to parliament. Her mother wrote in her diary that, “I shall never forget my feelings when I saw her sit on the Throne! That young girl 18 years old, being sole sovereign of the great country…”29

Almost one year after Victoria found out she was Queen she had her coronation ceremony. June 27, 1838 the Queen left Buckingham Palace at four in the afternoon on her way to Westminster Abbey. She rode in an open carriage and found the crowds to be very pleasant.30 This was the only rehearsal before the ceremony which was to take place the next day. Dr. John Ireland was Dean of Westminster was in charge but he was ill and unable to attend the ceremony. Dr. Ireland was 78 years old and had conducted the coronation services for George IV and William IV. Lord John Thynne was the Sub-Dean that took Dr. Ireland’s place. Lord Thynne rehearsed with the Archbishop but no one else. The night before the coronation the Queen wrote in her

27 Ibid., 139.
28 Ibid., 139.
29 Ibid., 149.
30 Ibid., 156.
diary that she did not sleep well she wrote that, “a feeling that something very awful was going to happen tomorrow.”

The morning of the coronation the queen awoke at 4 o’clock in the morning to guns going off in the park. She was not able to go back to sleep because there was so much noise going on outside. At 7 in the morning the Queen got up and looked out at Green Park and noticed crowds of people, soldiers, and bands atop Constitution Hill. By 9:30 the Queen was dressed. She wore a diamond necklace, a white satin petticoat ornamented with gold with a red velvet kirtle while on her head she wore a circlet of gold set with diamonds.

The Queen left the palace at 10 a.m. in the state coach which was pulled by eight cream horses. The coach went up Constitution Hill, then down Piccadilly, St James’s and Pall Mall to Trafalgar Square and Whitehall. The Queen was accompanied in her coach by the Duchess of Southerland whom was her Mistress of the Robes, and by the Earl of Albemarle whom was the Master of the Horse. The streets were lined with people all the way to Westminster Abbey.

Once they arrived the Queen was met with tremendous applause. Once she arrived she put on her red Parliamentary robe lined with ermine in the robbing room. The Queen had eight train-bearers, all young unmarried girls. The train-bearers wore white and silver tissue dresses with long trains. They wore silver wreaths trimmed with  

31 Ibid., 157.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Christopher Hibbert, Queen Victoria: A Personal History (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), 71.
35 Smith, Queen Victoria, 157.
pink rose buds in their hair. The Duchess of Richmond designed the dresses which had many complaints.\textsuperscript{36} The biggest complaint was that while the girls walked behind the Queen holding her train, they kept tripping on their own trains. The Queen walked down the aisle inside the Abbey undaunted by the occasion. The sides were surrounded by peers and peeresses.

The Queen got to the end of the aisle and the Litany was recited. She then took the oath, knelt and prayed while the choir sang. After her prayer the Queen stood up and went behind the alter to St. Edward’s Chapel. She took of her robe and her diamond headpiece then returned wearing a linen shift and the super tunica of cloth of gold. As she made her way from behind the alter she took her seat at St Edward’s Chair. Four Knights of the Garter then held a canopy of cloth of gold over the head of the Queen while the Archbishop anointed the Queen.\textsuperscript{37} It was quite evident that there never was a rehearsal with all the people involved in the ceremony. At one point the Queen quietly asked Lord Thynne what she was supposed to do next.\textsuperscript{38} Then the Bishop of Durham unexpectedly gave the orb to the Queen. Later in the ceremony when it was time to give the Queen the orb she already had it in her hands.\textsuperscript{39} The orb was almost too heavy for the young Queen to hold. Then the time came and the Queen put on the Dalmatic robe which was cloth of gold lined with ermine. The robe was put around the Queen and clasped; she then was given the scepter and the ring. The ring was put on her finger by the Archbishop which was squeezed on the wrong

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 158
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
finger. Then there was a prayer for the Queen and then the Sub-dean of Westminster gave the Crown of State to the Archbishop and placed it on the Queen’s head. At the same time all of the peers and peeresses put on their coronets. There was then guns firing from the parks drums and trumpets could be heard inside the Abbey from the surrounding streets the crowds then starting shouting God save the Queen.\textsuperscript{40}

It was then time for dignitaries to pay homage towards the Queen. First the Archbishop followed by her Uncles and then the Peers. At one point Lord Rolle an 82 year old man stumbled up the stairs to pay homage to the Queen. As he was about to pay homage he lost his footing and fell to the bottom of the steps. He got up and was about to start walking up the stairs again and then the Queen said, “May I not get up and meet him?” The Queen then rose from her throne and allowed the Lord Rolle the opportunity to pay homage without having to climb the stairs again.

After everyone had payed homage, the Queen left the throne taking off the crown and taking off the symbols of temporal sovereignty, took the sacrament.\textsuperscript{41} The Queen then put her crown and robes back on then there was singing and then the Bishop of Bath and Wells told the Queen that the services were over because he had accidently flipped to pages over at once while reading. The Queen thinking it was over went to the Chapel the Sub-dean quickly resolved the situation and the Queen came out again until the ceremony was over.

Finally the service was over and the choir sang the Hallelujah Chorus as the Queen with ladies and trainbearers correctly retreated this time to St Edward’s

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 159.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
The Queen then changed her robes again this time putting on her royal robe made of purple velvet. She then carried the scepter in her right hand and the orb in her left through the Abbey to the robing-room where her mother and other family members were waiting. Five hours had passed since the ceremony had started and it was not finally over. After the ceremony the Queen stayed in the robing-room soaking her hand in water so that she could try and remove the ring that the Archbishop had forcefully put on the wrong finger.

Finally after getting the ring off and putting it on the correct finger, the Queen got back in the coach wearing her robe, holding the scepter and holding the orb. They drove back to Buckingham Palace following the same route they had on their way to the ceremony. The streets were still lined with thousands of people to see the Queen. The Queen had done a marvelous job throughout the ceremony and after was exhausted and retired early.

Queen Victoria was young and still unmarried in October of 1839. On the tenth day of October the Queen received word that her Uncle King Leopold, Prince Albert, and Prince Ernest would be arriving that evening. At 7:30 p.m. they arrived at Windsor. This was an important day in her life for this was the moment the Queen fell in love with Albert. While visiting the Queen the young Prince Albert made a
favorable impression on the Queen. She even sent word to the Prince informing him that he had been making a good impression on her.\textsuperscript{48} On the morning of the fifteenth the Queen summoned the Prince to her privately. There the Queen informed the Prince that she chose to marry him and the Prince was delighted.\textsuperscript{49}

The Prince and his brother made plans and left England November 14, 1839, but before they left they set the date for the marriage between Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. February 10, 1840 was the date set for the marriage.\textsuperscript{50} The Queen had much to plan before the day of their marriage.

The morning of the wedding finally arrived; it was a dreadful day, cold and wet. Surprisingly there was a large crowd that wanted to see the couple pass. The marriage took place at the chapel Royal St James Palace.\textsuperscript{51} Albert entered the chapel first where he stood and waited up front for his bride.\textsuperscript{52} It was then time for Victoria to make her way down the aisle. The Queen wore a white satin dress trimmed with orange blossoms. She wore a wreath of the same flowers on her head over which was a veil of lace. She wore a diamond necklace and diamond earrings and she wore Albert’s sapphire brooch.\textsuperscript{53} The Queen had twelve bridesmaids that wore very simple

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Charlot, \textit{The Young Queen}, 183.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 184.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
dresses made of tulle and white roses. The ceremony was performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and was very simple.\textsuperscript{54}

A few weeks after their marriage the Queen realized she was pregnant. She wrote a letter to the Dowager Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha that she was unhappy. She said that she had prayed not to have a child until at least six months into their marriage but that was not to be and that she was most unhappy.\textsuperscript{55} The pregnancy went very well for the Queen. The Queen’s first born child was born nine months and eleven days after the wedding.

One year after their wedding the young princess was christened in Buckingham Palace. The young girl was christened Victoria Adelaide Mary Louisa. Throughout their marriage Queen Victoria and Albert went on to have nine children, five girls and four boys. They continued to have a happy marriage even though it had its trials like most marriages. Prince Albert and Queen Victoria loved all of their children. Like with all families they had their turbulent times, but always overcame the trials. Having children grow up as privileged as their own children they made sure they were grounded in values.

Prince Albert’s greatest political error was his underestimate of Palmerston. When the Crimean War broke out, the Prince was dominated by a sense of failure that he was not able to stop it. His unhappiness increased by the fact that his concerns before the war about the British army and its leadership came true during the Crimean

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 185.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
Surprisingly Plamerston turned out to be different when he became Prime Minister. When Palmerston was Foreign Secretary he was reckless but not as Prime Minister. Even though Palmerston and Prince Albert had a difficult background, Palmerston began to respect and hold Prince Albert with high regard as Prime Minister.  

The background of Queen Victoria makes the reality of her attitude understandable. When Victoria died in 1901 a preacher named Washington Gladden preached a sermon to his First Congregationalist Church in Columbus Ohio. He used Queen Victoria as an example for the member of the congregation.

Finally, it must be said of Victoria that her greatness was that of a true womanhood. It was her pure womanliness that drew to her the hearts of her people, with a strength of affection that no English monarch has ever called forth. There was no sufferer anywhere in her realm who was not sure of the queen’s sympathy; the neediest and lowliest felt that her heart was with them. And it was her womanliness that made her a great ruler. Victoria represented the perfect lady to many people like Washington Gladden. Victoria even had the nickname of “the grandmother of Europe.” Many believed that Victoria was like their own grandmother. She was someone you could go to

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57 Ibid.

58 Burdiel, *Queen*, 1.

59 Ibid.
and just talk about things with, but she had a temper unbeknownst to many. She seemed girlish and captivating.\textsuperscript{60}

One reason that so many people believed that Queen Victoria was the ideal woman was that she did have a kind heart. One of the first instances that that made Queen Victoria stand out as a caring, sweet person was at her coronation and she went to Lord Rolle instead of having him climb the stairs.\textsuperscript{61} Many people even remember her as a little girl riding a pony around the grounds of Kensington Palace.\textsuperscript{62} What was not known to the public was that the Queen had a temper. Those closes to the Queen knew her attitudes and knew what annoyed her.

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert was known for spending a considerable amount of money on charities.\textsuperscript{63} Prince Albert believed that the purpose of royalty was to be the headship of philanthropy.\textsuperscript{64} Both Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were very charitable but they gave to places of different character. Prince Albert tended to donate to small projects that had large public issues. He also had a special relationship with skilled workers and the working man.\textsuperscript{65} Victoria tended to donate to causes related to women and children.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{60} Erickson, \textit{Her Little Majesty}, 135.

\textsuperscript{61} Smith, \textit{Queen Victoria}, 159.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 80.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
Historians differ on the attitudes they believe Queen Victoria possessed. Carolly Erickson said that since she became Queen she had become “impossibly self-willed, with an obstinacy that drove away all her better instincts, and a hot temper, and a lamentable fondness,” for court ceremonies.\(^67\) Erickson also reminded the reader that after her son Leopold was born she became “impossible to live with, displaying that side of herself that made her unlovable.”\(^68\) Smith, on the other hand, made sure to show the Queen’s humanness and compassion. At one point the Queen visited wounded men back from Crimea. The Queen talked about in her diary how it made her heart bleed to see the men in the condition they were in.\(^69\) Smith also writes about the Queen after the death of Prince Albert in 1861. The Prince died of Typhoid fever leaving the Queen to be a widow at 42 years old.\(^70\) Smith writes about how the Prince was Victoria’s mainspring in her life. She also writes about the love the Queen had for the Prince was legendary.\(^71\) Smith also knew about the character of the Queen. She wrote about her emotions were at times so intense that she could reach violence.\(^72\)

“Honesty, generosity, loyalty were her good qualities; she never bore malice and it was rare to come into close contact with her without being inspired with true devotion.\(^73\)

Queen Victoria ruled Britain for over 63 years. She survived through many trials including assassination attempts on her and Prince Albert, the birth of nine children,

\(^67\) Erickson, *Her Little Majesty*, 82.
\(^68\) Ibid., 124.
\(^69\) Smith, *Queen Victoria*, 353.
\(^70\) Ibid., 430.
\(^71\) Ibid.
\(^72\) Ibid., 431.
\(^73\) Ibid.
and through many political trials. She was tough because she had to be. A woman monarch had to have an extra level of confidence to get the job done. Even though Queen Victoria once said that women had no role in politics, she did a marvelous job as Queen.

Her reign lasted so long that most people only remembered her as Queen and the thought of someone else taking over was terrifying. Queen Victoria grew up without a father and without a mother that would put the needs of her child first. Her mother the Duchess of Kent, through the manipulation of Sir John Conroy, put her own needs before that of her daughter. Though at the time she may not have known what she was doing, the affects lasted with the Queen throughout her life. She became bitter of things her mother did like how she asked for money. She was bitter because her mother showed so much affection for Sir John Conroy even after he had treated her so bad as a child.

Though she had many trials she reined for 63 years full of grace. Though difficult she stood for what she believed and what she thought would help her country improve. She saw Britain through tremendous changes during her 63 years as Queen. The social aspects of the country changed including many bills the contagious disease act. She saw the improvements of living situations and the invention of telephone and the light bulb. She lived through so much and through all the tough times she is still known as the grandmother of Europe. She had a temper and sometimes found it hard to hold her tongue, but the people still loved her. Her womanliness is what made her a great ruler.74

74 Burdiel.
Primary Sources

*The Times*


Secondary Sources


