

Queen Victoria

II

The Girlhood of Victoria

[The Duke of Kent, Victoria's father, is dead, and the Duchess is living with her children in Kensington Palace.]

IN 1827, the Duke of York, who had found some consolation for the loss of his wife in the sympathy of the Duchess of Rutland, died, leaving behind him the unfinished immensity of Stafford House and £200,000 worth of debts. Three years later George IV also disappeared, and the Duke of Clarence reigned in his stead. The new Queen, it was now clear, would in all probability never again be a mother; the Princess Victoria, therefore, was recognized by Parliament as heir presumptive; and the Duchess of Kent, whose annuity had been doubled five years previously, was now given an additional £10,000 for the maintenance of the Princess, and was appointed Regent, in case of the death of the King before the majority of her daughter. At the same time a great convulsion took place in the constitution of the state. The power of the Tories, who had dominated England for more than forty years, suddenly began to crumble. In the tremendous struggle that followed, it seemed for a moment as if the tradition of generations might be snapped, as if the blind tenacity of the reactionaries and the determined fury of their enemies could have no other issue than revolution. But the forces of compromise triumphed: the Reform bill was passed. The centre of gravity in the constitution was shifted towards the middle classes; the Whigs came into power; and the complexion of the government assumed a liberal tinge. One of the results of this new state of affairs was a change in the position of the Duchess of Kent and her daughter. From being the protégées of an opposition clique, they became assets of the official majority of the nation. The Princess Victoria was henceforward the living symbol of the victory of the middle classes. . . .

The Duchess's own liberalism was not very profound. She followed naturally in the footsteps of her husband, repeating with conviction the catchwords of her husband's clever friends and the generalizations of her clever brother Leopold. She herself had no pretensions to cleverness; she did not understand very much about the Poor law and the slave trade and political economy; but she hoped that she did her duty; and she hoped—she ardently hoped—that the same might be said of Victoria. Her educational conceptions were those of Dr. Arnold, whose views were just then be-

ginning to permeate society. Dr. Arnold's object was, first and foremost, to make his pupils "in the highest and truest sense of the words, Christian gentlemen"; intellectual refinements might follow. The Duchess felt convinced that it was her supreme duty in life to make quite sure that her daughter should grow up into a Christian Queen. To this task she bent all her energies; and, as the child developed, she flattered herself that her efforts were not unsuccessful. When the Princess was eleven, she desired the Bishops of London and Lincoln to submit her daughter to an examination, and report upon the progress that had been made. "I feel the time to be now come," the Duchess explained, in a letter obviously drawn up by her own hand, "that what has been done should be put to some test, that if anything has been done in error of judgment it may be corrected, and that the plan for the future should be open to consideration and revision. . . . I attend almost always myself every lesson, or a part; and as the Lady about the Princess is a competent person, she assists Her in preparing Her lessons, for the various masters, as I resolved to act in that manner so as to be Her governess myself . . . When she was at a proper age she commenced attending Divine Service regularly with me, and I have every feeling that she has religion at Her heart, that she is morally impressed with it to that degree, that she is less liable to error by its application to her feelings as a Child capable of reflection." "The general bent of Her character," added the Duchess, "is strength of intellect, capable of receiving with ease, information, and with a peculiar readiness in coming to a very just and benignant decision on any point Her opinion is asked on. Her adherence to truth is of so marked a character that I feel no apprehension of that Bulwark being broken down by any circumstances." The Bishops attended at the Palace, and the result of their examination was all that could be wished. "In answering a great variety of questions proposed to her," they reported, "the Princess displayed an accurate knowledge of the most important features of Scripture History, and of the leading truths and precepts of the Christian Religion as taught by the Church of England, as well as an acquaintance with the Chronology and principal facts of English History remarkable in so young a person. To questions in Geography, the use of the Globes, Arithmetic, and Latin Grammar, the answers which the Princess returned were equally satisfactory." They did not believe that

the Duchess's plan of education was susceptible of any improvement; and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was also consulted, came to the same gratifying conclusion.

One important step, however, remained to be taken. So far, as the Duchess explained to the Bishops, the Princess had been kept in ignorance of the station that she was likely to fill. "She is aware of its duties, and that a Sovereign should live for others; so that when Her innocent mind receives the impression of Her future fate, she receives it with a mind formed to be sensible of what is expected from Her, and it is to be hoped she will be too well grounded in Her principles to be dazzled with the station she is to look to." In the following year, it was decided that she should be enlightened on this point. The well-known scene followed:—the history lesson, the genealogical table of the Kings of England slipped beforehand by the governess into the book, the Princess's surprise, her inquiries, her final realization of the facts. When the child at last understood, she was silent for a moment, and then she spoke, "I will be good," she said. The words were something more than a conventional protestation, something more than the expression of a superimposed desire; they were, in their limitation and their intensity, their egotism and their humility, an instinctive summary of the dominating qualities of a life. "I cried much on learning it," Her Majesty noted long afterwards. No doubt, while the others were present, even her dear Lehzen,* the little girl kept up her self-command; and then crept away somewhere to ease her heart of an inward unfamiliar agitation, with a handkerchief, out of her mother's sight.

But her mother's sight was by no means an easy thing to escape. Morning and evening, day and night, there was no relaxation of the maternal vigilance. The child grew into the girl, the girl into the young woman; but still she slept in her mother's bedroom; still she had no place allowed her where she might sit or work by herself. An extraordinary watchfulness surrounded her every step: up to the day of her accession, she never went downstairs without someone beside her holding her hand. Plainness and regularity ruled the household. The hours, the days, the years, passed slowly and methodically by. The dolls—the innumerable dolls, each one so neatly dressed, each one with its name so punctiliously entered in the catalogue—were laid aside, and a little music and a little dancing took their place. Taglioni came, to give grace and dignity to the figure, and Lablache, to train the piping treble upon his own rich

bass. The Dean of Chester, the official Preceptor, continued his endless instruction in Scripture History, while the Duchess of Northumberland, the official governess, presided over every lesson with becoming solemnity. Without doubt, the Princess's main achievement during her schooldays was linguistic. German was naturally the first language with which she was familiar; but English and French quickly followed; and she became virtually trilingual, though her mastery of English grammar remained incomplete. At the same time, she acquired a working knowledge of Italian, and some smattering of Latin. Nevertheless she did not read very much. It was not an occupation that she cared for; partly, perhaps, because the books that were given her were all either sermons, which were very dull, or poetry, which was incomprehensible. Novels were strictly forbidden. Lord Durham persuaded her mother to get her some of Miss Martineau's tales, illustrating the truths of political economy, and they delighted her; but it is to be feared that it was the unaccustomed pleasure of the story that filled her mind, and that she never really mastered the theory of exchanges or the nature of rent.

It was her misfortune that the mental atmosphere which surrounded her during these years of adolescence was almost entirely feminine. No father, no brother was there, to break in upon the gentle monotony of the daily round with impetuosity, with rudeness, with careless laughter and wafts of freedom from the outside world. The Princess was never called by a voice that was loud and growling; never felt, as a matter of course, a hard rough cheek on her own soft one; never climbed a wall with a boy. The visits to Claremont—delicious little escapes into male society—came to an end when she was eleven years old and Prince Leopold left England to be King of the Belgians. She loved him still; he was still "il mio secondo padre—or rather solo padre, for he is indeed like my real father, as I have none"; but his fatherliness now came to her dimly and indirectly, through the cold channel of correspondence. Henceforward female duty, female elegance, female enthusiasm, hemmed her completely in; and her spirit, amid the enclosing folds, was hardly reached by those two great influences, without which no growing life can truly prosper—humor and imagination. The Baroness Lehzen—for she had been raised to that rank in the Hanoverian nobility by George IV before he died—was the real centre of the Princess's world. When Feodora* married, when Uncle Leopold went to Belgium, the Baroness was

* Victoria's governess.

* Victoria's half-sister.

left without a competitor. The Princess gave her mother her dutiful sentiments; but Lehzen had her heart. The voluble, shrewd daughter of the pastor in Hanover lavishing her devotion on her royal charge, had reaped her reward in an unbounded confidence and a passionate adoration. The girl would have gone through fire for her "*precious* Lehzen," the "best and truest friend," she declared, that she had had since her birth. Her Journal, begun when she was thirteen, where she registered day by day the small succession of her doings and her sentiments, bears on every page of it the traces of the Baroness and her circumambient influence. The young creature that one sees there, self-depicted in ingenuous clarity, with her sincerity, her simplicity, her quick affection and pious resolutions, might almost have been the daughter of a German pastor herself. Her enjoyments, her admirations, her engouements were of the kind that clothed themselves naturally in underlinings and exclamation marks. "It was a *delightful* ride. We cantered a good deal. *Sweet little Rosey* went beautifully!! We came home at a $\frac{1}{4}$ past 1 At 20 minutes to 7 we went out to the Opera. . . . Rubini came on and sang a song out of Anna Boulena *quite beautifully*. We came home at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 11." In her comments on her readings, the mind of the Baroness is clearly revealed. One day, by some mistake, she was allowed to take up a volume of memoirs by Fanny Kemble. "It is certainly very pertly and oddly written. One would imagine by the style that the authoress must be very pert, and not well bred; for there are so many vulgar expressions in it. It is a great pity that a person endowed with so much talent, as Mrs. Butler really is, should turn it to so little account and publish a book which is so full of trash and nonsense which can only do her harm. I stayed up till 20 minutes past 9." Madame de Sévigné's letters, which the Baroness read aloud, met with more approval. "How truly elegant and natural her style is! It is so full of naiveté, cleverness, and grace." But her highest admiration was reserved for the Bishop of Chester's Exposition of the Gospel of St. Matthew. "It is a very fine book indeed. Just the sort of one I like; which is just plain and comprehensible and full of truth and good feeling. It is not one of those learned books in which you have to cavil at almost every paragraph. Lehzen gave it me on the Sunday that I took the Sacrament." A few weeks previously, she had been confirmed, and she described the event as follows:—"I felt that my confirmation was one of the most solemn and important events and acts in my life; and that I trusted that it might have a salutary effect on my

mind. I felt deeply repentant for all what I had done which was wrong and trusted in God Almighty to strengthen my heart and mind; and to forsake all that is bad and follow all that is virtuous and right. I went with the firm determination to become a true Christian, to try and comfort my dear Mamma in all her griefs, trials, and anxieties, and to become a dutiful and affectionate daughter to her. Also to be obedient to *dear* Lehzen who has done so much for me. I was dressed in a white lace dress, with a white crepe bonnet with a wreath of white roses, round it. I went in the chariot with my dear Mamma and the others followed in another carriage." One seems to hold in one's hand a small smooth crystal pebble, without a flaw and without a scintillation, and so transparent that one can see through it at a glance.

LYTTON STRACHEY.

(To be continued.)

Fulfillment

WIRTH'S (locally pronounced Worth's) is an inn and summer dining place at the water's edge, an hour by trolley from the city. It is pleasant there, of soft summer evenings, when the stars twinkle out in the eastern sky and the white sails of belated yachts zigzag over the profound black waters, like the moths over the spreading lawn. The mists above the city in the distance transform the white and yellow lights of the streets into a miracle of pinks and purples, with occasional touches of dimmed crimson. It is a quiet place, though the diners may number hundreds, and are of the variety of city folk that usually represent noise, wherever they go; and Wirth's is an oasis where the dry law is honored only in the breach. Perhaps it is the wonder of the lapping waters below or of the halo of soft colors above the city; perhaps it is the occasional golden note of the Italian singers in the balcony above the veranda; whatever it may be, it casts a spell upon the strident spirit of the summer diners. Anyway, it is uncommonly quiet and pleasant there, in summer.

But I went there last in winter, when the sky and water were dreary, the veranda a wind-swept waste and the glazed room behind it a storehouse of folding chairs and tables. In winter there are no hired cooks and waiters at Wirth's; Mrs. Wirth and her son look after the needs of the chance guest. Mrs. Wirth is vast, quadruple chinned, with a purple bloom on her hanging cheeks where the veins show through, and her son is made to match.