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# QUEEN VICTORIA

**A Life**

Lytton Strachey



**TPP**

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*To Virginia Woolf*

Authority for every important statement of fact in the following pages will be found in the footnotes. The full titles of the works to which reference is made are given in the Bibliography at the end of the volume.

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QUEEN VICTORIA IN 1897



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## 1. *Antecedents*

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### I

ON 6 November 1817 died the Princess Charlotte, only child of the Prince Regent, and heir to the crown of England. Her short life had hardly been a happy one. By nature impulsive, capricious, and vehement, she had always longed for liberty; and she had never possessed it. She had been brought up among violent family quarrels, had been early separated from her disreputable and eccentric mother, and handed over to the care of her disreputable and selfish father. When she was seventeen, he decided to marry her off to the Prince of Orange; she, at first, acquiesced; but, suddenly falling in love with Prince Augustus of Prussia, she determined to break off the engagement. This was not her first love affair, for she had previously carried on a clandestine correspondence with a Captain Hess. Prince Augustus was already married, morganatically, but she did not know it, and he did not tell her. While she was spinning out the negotiations with the Prince of Orange, the allied sovereigns – it was June 1814 – arrived in London to celebrate their victory. Among them, in the suite of the Emperor of Russia, was the young and handsome Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. He made several attempts to attract the notice of the Princess, but she, with her heart elsewhere, paid very little attention. Next month the Prince Regent, discovering that his daughter was having secret meetings with Prince Augustus, suddenly appeared upon the scene and, after dismissing her household, sentenced her to a strict seclusion in Windsor Park. ‘God Almighty grant me patience!’ she exclaimed, falling on her knees in an agony of agitation: then she jumped up, ran down the backstairs and out into the street, hailed a passing cab, and drove to her mother’s house in Bayswater. She was discovered, pursued, and at length, yielding to the persuasions of her uncles, the Dukes of York and Sussex, of Brougham, and of the Bishop of Salisbury, she returned to Carlton House at two o’clock in the morning. She was immured at Windsor, but no more was heard of the Prince of

Orange. Prince Augustus, too, disappeared. The way was at last open to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg.<sup>1</sup>

This Prince was clever enough to get round the Regent, to impress the Ministers, and to make friends with another of the Princess's uncles, the Duke of Kent. Through the Duke he was able to communicate privately with the Princess, who now declared that he was necessary to her happiness. When, after Waterloo, he was in Paris, the Duke's aide-de-camp carried letters backwards and forwards across the Channel. In January 1816 he was invited to England, and in May the marriage took place.<sup>2</sup>

The character of Prince Leopold contrasted strangely with that of his wife. The younger son of a German princeling, he was at this time twenty-six years of age; he had served with distinction in the war against Napoleon; he had shown considerable diplomatic skill at the Congress of Vienna;<sup>3</sup> and he was now to try his hand at the task of taming a tumultuous Princess. Cold and formal in manner, collected in speech, careful in action, he soon dominated the wild, impetuous, generous creature by his side. There was much in her, he found, of which he could not approve. She quizzed, she stamped, she roared with laughter; she had very little of that self-command which is especially required of princes; her manners were abominable. Of the latter he was a good judge, having moved, as he himself explained to his niece many years later, in the best society of Europe, being in fact 'what is called in French *de la fleur des pois*'. There was continual friction, but every scene ended in the same way. Standing before him like a rebellious boy in petticoats, her body pushed forward, her hands behind her back, with flaming cheeks and sparkling eyes, she would declare at last that she was ready to do whatever he wanted. 'If you wish it, I will do it,' she would say. 'I want nothing for myself,' he invariably answered; 'when I press something on you, it is from a conviction that it is for your interest and for your good.'<sup>4</sup>

1. Greville, Vol. II, pp. 326-8; Stockmar, Ch. 1, p. 86; Knight, Vol. I, Chs. 15-18 and Appendix, and Vol. II, Ch. 1.

2. Grey, pp. 384, 386-8; *Letters*, Vol. II, p. 40.

3. Grey, pp. 375-86.

4. *Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 216, 222-3; Vol. II, pp. 39-40; Stockmar, pp. 87-90.

Among the members of the household at Claremont, near Esher, where the royal pair were established, was a young German physician, Christian Friedrich Stockmar. He was the son of a minor magistrate in Coburg, and, after taking part as a medical officer in the war, he had settled down as a doctor in his native town. Here he had met Prince Leopold, who had been struck by his ability, and, on his marriage, brought him to England as his personal physician. A curious fate awaited this young man; many were the gifts which the future held in store for him – many and various – influence, power, mystery, unhappiness, a broken heart. At Claremont his position was a very humble one; but the Princess took a fancy to him, called him ‘Stocky’, and romped with him along the corridors. Dyspeptic by constitution, melancholic by temperament, he could yet be lively on occasion, and was known as a wit in Coburg. He was virtuous, too, and observed the royal *ménage* with approbation. ‘My master,’ he wrote in his diary, ‘is the best of all husbands in all the five quarters of the globe; and his wife bears him an amount of love, the greatness of which can only be compared with the English national debt.’ Before long he gave proof of another quality – a quality which was to colour the whole of his life – cautious sagacity. When, in the spring of 1817, it was known that the Princess was expecting a child, the post of one of her physicians-in-ordinary was offered to him, and he had the good sense to refuse it. He perceived that his colleagues would be jealous of him, that his advice would probably not be taken, but that, if anything were to go wrong, it would be certainly the foreign doctor who would be blamed. Very soon, indeed, he came to the opinion that the low diet and constant bleedings, to which the unfortunate Princess was subjected, were an error; he drew the Prince aside, and begged him to communicate this opinion to the English doctors; but it was useless. The fashionable lowering treatment was continued for months. On 5 November, at nine o’clock in the evening, after a labour of over fifty hours, the Princess was delivered of a dead boy. At midnight her exhausted strength gave way. Then, at last, Stockmar consented to see her; he went in, and found her obviously dying, while the doctors were plying her with wine. She seized his hand and pressed it. ‘They have made me tipsy,’ she said. After a little he left her, and was already in

the next room when he heard her call out in her loud voice, 'Stocky! Stocky!' As he ran back the death-rattle was in her throat. She tossed herself violently from side to side; then suddenly drew up her legs, and it was over.

The Prince, after hours of watching, had left the room for a few moments' rest; and Stockmar had now to tell him that his wife was dead. At first he could not be made to realize what had happened. On their way to her room he sank down on a chair while Stockmar knelt beside him: it was all a dream; it was impossible. At last, by the bed he, too, knelt down and kissed the cold hands. Then rising and exclaiming, 'Now I am quite desolate. Promise me never to leave me,' he threw himself into Stockmar's arms.<sup>5</sup>

## II

The tragedy at Claremont was of a most upsetting kind. The royal kaleidoscope had suddenly shifted, and nobody could tell how the new pattern would arrange itself. The succession to the throne, which had seemed so satisfactorily settled, now became a matter of urgent doubt.

George III was still living, an aged lunatic, at Windsor, completely impervious to the impressions of the outer world. Of his seven sons, the youngest was of more than middle age, and none had legitimate offspring. The outlook, therefore, was ambiguous. It seemed highly improbable that the Prince Regent, who had lately been obliged to abandon his stays, and presented a preposterous figure of debauched obesity,<sup>6</sup> could ever again, even on the supposition that he divorced his wife and re-married, become the father of a family. Besides the Duke of Kent, who must be noticed separately, the other brothers, in order of seniority, were the Dukes of York, Clarence, Cumberland, Sussex, and Cambridge; their situations and prospects require a brief description. The Duke of York, whose escapades in times past with Mrs Clarke and the army had brought him into trouble, now divided his life

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5. Stockmar, *Biographische Skizze*, and Ch. 3.

6. Creevey, Vol. I, pp. 264, 272: 'Prinny has let loose his belly, which now reaches his knees; otherwise he is said to be well'; 279.

between London and a large, extravagantly ordered and extremely uncomfortable country house where he occupied himself with racing, whist, and improper stories. He was remarkable among the princes for one reason: he was the only one of them – so we are informed by a highly competent observer – who had the feelings of a gentleman. He had been long married to the Princess Royal of Prussia, a lady who rarely went to bed and was perpetually surrounded by vast numbers of dogs, parrots, and monkeys.<sup>7</sup> They had no children. The Duke of Clarence had lived for many years in complete obscurity with Mrs Jordan, the actress, in Bushey Park. By her he had had a large family of sons and daughters, and had appeared, in effect, to be married to her, when he suddenly separated from her and offered to marry Miss Wykeham, a crazy woman of large fortune, who, however, would have nothing to say to him. Shortly afterwards Mrs Jordan died in distressed circumstances in Paris.<sup>8</sup> The Duke of Cumberland was probably the most unpopular man in England. Hideously ugly, with a distorted eye, he was bad-tempered and vindictive in private, a violent reactionary in politics, and was subsequently suspected of murdering his valet and of having carried on an amorous intrigue of an extremely scandalous kind.<sup>9</sup> He had lately married a German princess, but there were as yet no children by the marriage. The Duke of Sussex had mildly literary tastes and collected books.<sup>10</sup> He had married Lady Augusta Murray, by whom he had two children, but the marriage, under the Royal Marriages Act, was declared void. On Lady Augusta's death, he married Lady Cecilia Buggin; she changed her name to Underwood; but this marriage also was void. Of the Duke of Cambridge, the youngest of the brothers, not very much was known. He lived in Hanover, wore a blond wig, chattered and fidgeted a great deal, and was unmarried.<sup>11</sup>

Besides his seven sons, George III had five surviving daughters. Of these, two – the Queen of Würtemberg and the Duchess of Gloucester – were married and childless. The three unmarried princesses – Augusta, Elizabeth, and Sophia – were all over forty.

7. Greville, Vol. I, pp. 5–7. 8. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 2.

9. Stockmar, p. 95; Creevey, Vol. I, p. 148; Greville, Vol. I, p. 228; Lieven, pp. 183–4. 10. Crawford, p. 24. 11. *ibid.*, pp. 80, 113.

## III

The fourth son of George III was Edward, Duke of Kent. He was now fifty years of age – a tall, stout, vigorous man, highly-coloured, with bushy eyebrows, a bald top to his head, and what hair he had carefully dyed a glossy black. His dress was extremely neat, and in his whole appearance there was a rigidity which did not belie his character. He had spent his early life in the army – at Gibraltar, in Canada, in the West Indies – and, under the influence of military training, had become at first a disciplinarian and at last a martinet. In 1802, having been sent to Gibraltar to restore order in a mutinous garrison, he was recalled for undue severity, and his active career had come to an end. Since then he had spent his life regulating his domestic arrangements with great exactitude, busying himself with the affairs of his numerous dependents, designing clocks, and struggling to restore order to his finances, for, in spite of his being, as someone said who knew him well, *'réglé comme du papier à musique'*, and in spite of an income of £24,000 a year, he was hopelessly in debt. He had quarrelled with most of his brothers, particularly with the Prince Regent, and it was only natural that he should have joined the political Opposition and become a pillar of the Whigs.

What his political opinions may actually have been is open to doubt; it has often been asserted that he was a Liberal, or even a Radical; and, if we are to believe Robert Owen, he was a necessitarian Socialist. His relations with Owen – the shrewd, gullible, high-minded, wrong-headed, illustrious and preposterous father of Socialism and Cooperation – were curious and characteristic. He talked of visiting the Mills at New Lanark; he did, in fact, preside at one of Owen's public meetings; he corresponded with him on confidential terms, and he even (so Owen assures us) returned, after his death, from 'the sphere of spirits' to give encouragement to the Owenites on earth. 'In an especial manner,' says Owen,

I have to name the very anxious feelings of the spirit of his Royal Highness the late Duke of Kent (who early informed me there were no titles in the spiritual spheres into which he had entered), to bene-

fit, not a class, a sect, a party, or any particular country, but the whole of the human race through futurity.

'His whole spirit-proceeding with me has been most beautiful,' Owen adds, 'making his own appointments; and never in one instance has this spirit not been punctual to the minute he had named.' But Owen was of a sanguine temperament. He also numbered among his proselytes President Jefferson, Prince Metternich, and Napoleon; so that some uncertainty must still linger over the Duke of Kent's views. But there is no uncertainty about another circumstance: his Royal Highness borrowed from Robert Owen, on various occasions, various sums of money which were never repaid and amounted in all to several hundred pounds.<sup>12</sup>

After the death of the Princess Charlotte it was clearly important, for more than one reason, that the Duke of Kent should marry. From the point of view of the nation, the lack of heirs in the reigning family seemed to make the step almost obligatory; it was also likely to be highly expedient from the point of view of the Duke. To marry as a public duty, for the sake of the royal succession, would surely deserve some recognition from a grateful country. When the Duke of York had married he had received a settlement of £25,000 a year. Why should not the Duke of Kent look forward to an equal sum? But the situation was not quite simple. There was the Duke of Clarence to be considered; he was the elder brother, and, if he married, would clearly have the prior claim. On the other hand, if the Duke of Kent married, it was important to remember that he would be making a serious sacrifice; a lady was involved.

The Duke, reflecting upon all these matters with careful attention, happened, about a month after his niece's death, to visit Brussels, and learnt that Mr Creevey was staying in the town. Mr Creevey was a close friend of the leading Whigs and an inveterate gossip; and it occurred to the Duke that there could be no better channel through which to communicate his views upon the situation to political circles at home. Apparently it did not occur to him that Mr Creevey was malicious and might keep a diary.

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12. Stockmar, pp. 112-13; *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 8. Crawford, pp. 27-30; Owen, pp. 193-4, 197-8, 199, 229.

He therefore sent for him on some trivial pretext, and a remarkable conversation ensued.

After referring to the death of the Princess, to the improbability of the Regent's seeking a divorce, to the childlessness of the Duke of York, and to the possibility of the Duke of Clarence marrying, the Duke adverted to his own position. 'Should the Duke of Clarence not marry,' he said,

the next prince in succession is myself, and although I trust I shall be at all times ready to obey any call my country may make upon me, God only knows the sacrifice it will be to make, whenever I shall think it my duty to become a married man. It is now seven-and-twenty years that Madame St Laurent and I have lived together: we are of the same age, and have been in all climates, and in all difficulties together, and you may well imagine, Mr Creevey, the pang it will occasion me to part with her. I put it to your own feelings – in the event of any separation between you and Mrs Creevey. . . . As for Madame St Laurent herself, I protest I don't know what is to become of her if a marriage is to be forced upon me; her feelings are already so agitated upon the subject.

The Duke went on to describe how, one morning, a day or two after the Princess Charlotte's death, a paragraph had appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*, alluding to the possibility of his marriage. He had received the newspaper at breakfast together with his letters, and

I did as is my constant practice, I threw the newspaper across the table to Madame St Laurent, and began to open and read my letters. I had not done so but a very short time, when my attention was called to an extraordinary noise and a strong convulsive movement in Madame St Laurent's throat. For a short time I entertained serious apprehensions for her safety; and when, upon her recovery, I inquired into the occasion of this attack, she pointed to the article in the *Morning Chronicle*.

The Duke then returned to the subject of the Duke of Clarence.

My brother the Duke of Clarence is the elder brother, and has certainly the right to marry if he chooses, and I would not interfere with him on any account. If he wishes to be king – to be married and have children, poor man – God help him! let him do so. For myself – I am a man of no ambition, and wish only to remain as I am. . . . Easter, you



know, falls very early this year – the 22nd of March. If the Duke of Clarence does not take any step before that time, I must find some pretext to reconcile Madame St Laurent to my going to England for a short time. When once there, it will be easy for me to consult with my friends as to the proper steps to be taken. Should the Duke of Clarence do nothing before that time as to marrying it will become my duty, no doubt, to take some measures upon the subject myself.

Two names, the Duke said, had been mentioned in this connection – those of the Princess of Baden and the Princess of Saxe-Coburg. The latter, he thought, would perhaps be the better of the two, from the circumstance of Prince Leopold being so popular with the nation; but before any other steps were taken, he hoped and expected to see justice done to Madame St Laurent. ‘She is,’ he explained,

of very good family, and has never been an actress, and I am the first and only person who ever lived with her. Her disinterestedness, too, has been equal to her fidelity. When she first came to me it was upon £100 a year. That sum was afterwards raised to £400, and finally to £1,000; but when my debts made it necessary for me to sacrifice a great part of my income, Madame St Laurent insisted upon again returning to her income of £400 a year. If Madame St Laurent is to return to live amongst her friends, it must be in such a state of independence as to command their respect. I shall not require very much, but a certain number of servants and a carriage are essentials.

As to his own settlement, the Duke observed that he would expect the Duke of York’s marriage to be considered the precedent. ‘That,’ he said,

was a marriage for the succession, and £25,000 for income was settled, in addition to all his other income, purely on that account. I shall be contented with the same arrangement, without making any demands grounded on the difference of the value of money in 1792 and at present.

‘As for the payment of my debts,’ the Duke concluded, ‘I don’t call them great. The nation, on the contrary, is greatly my debtor.’ Here a clock struck, and seemed to remind the Duke that he had an appointment; he rose, and Mr Creevey left him.

Who could keep such a communication secret? Certainly not Mr Creevey. He hurried off to tell the Duke of Wellington, who

was very much amused, and he wrote a long account of it to Lord Sefton, who received the letter 'very apropos', while a surgeon was sounding his bladder to ascertain whether he had a stone. 'I never saw a fellow more astonished than he was,' wrote Lord Sefton in his reply,

at seeing me laugh as soon as the operation was over. Nothing could be more first-rate than the royal Edward's ingenuousness. One does not know which to admire most – the delicacy of his attachment to Madame St Laurent, the refinement of his sentiments towards the Duke of Clarence, or his own perfect disinterestedness in pecuniary matters.<sup>13</sup>

As it turned out, both the brothers decided to marry. The Duke of Kent, selecting the Princess of Saxe-Coburg in preference to the Princess of Baden, was united to her on 29 May 1818. On 11 June, the Duke of Clarence followed suit with a daughter of the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. But they were disappointed in their financial expectations; for though the Government brought forward proposals to increase their allowances, together with that of the Duke of Cumberland, the motions were defeated in the House of Commons. At this the Duke of Wellington was not surprised. 'By God!' he said,

there is a great deal to be said about that. They are the damndest millstones about the necks of any Government that can be imagined. They have insulted – personally insulted – two-thirds of the gentlemen of England, and how can it be wondered at that they take their revenge upon them in the House of Commons? It is their only opportunity and, I think, by God! they are quite right to use it.

Eventually, however, Parliament increased the Duke of Kent's annuity by £6,000.

The subsequent history of Madame St Laurent has not transpired.

#### IV

The new Duchess of Kent, Victoria Mary Louisa, was a daughter of Francis, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, and a sister of Prince

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13. Creevey, Vol. I, pp. 267–71.

14. *ibid.*, pp. 276–7.

Leopold. The family was an ancient one, being a branch of the great House of Wettin, which since the eleventh century had ruled over the March of Meissen on the Elbe. In the fifteenth century the whole possessions of the House had been divided between the Albertine and Ernestine branches: from the former descended the electors and kings of Saxony; the latter, ruling over Thuringia, became further subdivided into five branches, of which the duchy of Saxe-Coburg was one. This principality was very small, containing about 60,000 inhabitants, but it enjoyed independent and sovereign rights. During the disturbed years which followed the French Revolution, its affairs became terribly involved. The Duke was extravagant, and kept open house for the swarms of refugees, who fled eastward over Germany as the French power advanced. Among these was the Prince of Leiningen, an elderly beau, whose domains on the Moselle had been seized by the French, but who was granted in compensation the territory of Amorbach in Lower Franconia. In 1803 he married the Princess Victoria, at that time seventeen years of age. Three years later Duke Francis died a ruined man. The Napoleonic harrow passed over Saxe-Coburg. The duchy was seized by the French, and the ducal family were reduced to beggary, almost to starvation. At the same time the little principality of Amorbach was devastated by the French, Russian, and Austrian armies, marching and counter-marching across it. For years there was hardly a cow in the country, nor enough grass to feed a flock of geese. Such was the desperate plight of the family which, a generation later, was to have gained a foothold in half the reigning Houses of Europe. The Napoleonic harrow had indeed done its work; the seed was planted; and the crop would have surprised Napoleon. Prince Leopold, thrown upon his own resources at fifteen, made a career for himself and married the heiress of England. The Princess of Leiningen, struggling at Amorbach with poverty, military requisitions, and a futile husband, developed an independence of character and a tenacity of purpose which were to prove useful in very different circumstances. In 1814, her husband died, leaving her with two children and the regency of the principality. After her brother's marriage with the Princess Charlotte, it was proposed that she should marry the Duke of Kent; but she declined, on the ground that the guardianship of

her children and the management of her domains made other ties undesirable. The Princess Charlotte's death, however, altered the case; and when the Duke of Kent renewed his offer, she accepted it. She was thirty-two years old – short, stout, with brown eyes and hair, and rosy cheeks, cheerful and voluble, and gorgeously attired in rustling silks and bright velvets.<sup>15</sup>

She was certainly fortunate in her contented disposition; for she was fated, all through her life, to have much to put up with. Her second marriage, with its dubious prospects, seemed at first to be chiefly a source of difficulties and discomforts. The Duke, declaring that he was still too poor to live in England, moved about with uneasy precision through Belgium and Germany, attending parades and inspecting barracks in a neat military cap, while the English notabilities looked askance, and the Duke of Wellington dubbed him the Corporal. 'God damme!' he exclaimed to Mr Creevey, 'd'ye know what his sisters call him? By God! they call him Joseph Surface!' At Valenciennes, where there was a review and a great dinner, the Duchess arrived with an old and ugly lady-in-waiting, and the Duke of Wellington found himself in a difficulty. 'Who the devil is to take out the maid of honour?' he kept asking; but at last he thought of a solution. 'Damme, Freemantle, find out the mayor and let him do it.' So the Mayor of Valenciennes was brought up for the purpose, and – so we learn from Mr Creevey – 'a capital figure he was'. A few days later, at Brussels, Mr Creevey himself had an unfortunate experience. A military school was to be inspected – before breakfast. The company assembled; everything was highly satisfactory; but the Duke of Kent continued for so long examining every detail and asking meticulous question after meticulous question, that Mr Creevey at last could bear it no longer, and whispered to his neighbour that he was damned hungry. The Duke of Wellington heard him, and was delighted. 'I recommend you,' he said, 'whenever you start with the royal family in a morning, and particularly with *the Corporal*, always to breakfast first.' He and his staff, it turned out, had taken that precaution, and the great man amused himself, while the stream of royal inquiries poured

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15. *Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 1–3; Grey, pp. 373–81, 389; Crawford, pp. 30–34; Stockmar, p. 113.

on, by pointing at Mr Creevey from time to time with the remark, '*Voilà le monsieur qui n'a pas déjeuné !*'<sup>16</sup>

Settled down at last at Amorbach, the time hung heavily on the Duke's hands. The establishment was small, the country was impoverished; even clock-making grew tedious at last. He brooded – for in spite of his piety the Duke was not without a vein of superstition – over the prophecy of a gipsy at Gibraltar who had told him that he was to have many losses and crosses, that he was to die in happiness, and that his only child was to be a great queen. Before long it became clear that a child was to be expected: the Duke decided that it should be born in England. Funds were lacking for the journey, but his determination was not to be set aside. Come what might, he declared, his child must be English-born. A carriage was hired, and the Duke himself mounted the box. Inside were the Duchess, her daughter Feodora, a girl of fourteen, with maids, nurses, lap-dogs, and canaries. Off they drove – through Germany, through France: bad roads, cheap inns, were nothing to the rigorous Duke and the equable, abundant Duchess. The Channel was crossed, London was reached in safety. The authorities provided a set of rooms in Kensington Palace; and there, on 24 May 1819, a female infant was born.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Creevey, Vol. I, pp. 282–4. 17. Crawford, pp. 25, 37–8.

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## 2. *Childhood*

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### I

THE child who, in these not very impressive circumstances, appeared in the world, received but scant attention. There was small reason to foresee her destiny. The Duchess of Clarence, two months before, had given birth to a daughter; this infant, indeed, had died almost immediately; but it seemed highly probable that the Duchess would again become a mother; and so it actually fell out. More than this, the Duchess of Kent was young, and the Duke was strong; there was every likelihood that before long a brother would follow, to snatch her faint chance of the succession from the little princess.

Nevertheless, the Duke had other views: there were prophecies. . . . At any rate, he would christen the child Elizabeth, a name of happy augury. In this, however, he reckoned without the Regent, who, seeing a chance of annoying his brother, suddenly announced that he himself would be present at the baptism, and signified at the same time that one of the godfathers was to be the Emperor Alexander of Russia. And so when the ceremony took place, and the Archbishop of Canterbury asked by what name he was to baptize the child, the Regent replied 'Alexandrina'. At this the Duke ventured to suggest that another name might be added. 'Certainly,' said the Regent; 'Georgina?' 'Or Elizabeth?' said the Duke. There was a pause, during which the Archbishop, with the baby in his lawn sleeves, looked with some uneasiness from one Prince to the other. 'Very well, then,' said the Regent at last, 'call her after her mother. But Alexandrina must come first.' Thus, to the disgust of her father, the child was christened Alexandrina Victoria.<sup>1</sup>

The Duke had other subjects of disgust. The meagre grant of the Commons had by no means put an end to his financial distresses. It was to be feared that his services were not appreciated by the nation. His debts continued to grow. For many years he

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1. Murray, pp. 62-3; Lee, pp. 11-12.

had lived upon £7,000 a year; but now his expenses were exactly doubled; he could make no further reductions; as it was, there was not a single servant in his establishment who was idle for a moment from morning to night. He poured out his griefs in a long letter to Robert Owen, whose sympathy had the great merit of being practical. 'I now candidly state,' he wrote,

that, after viewing the subject in every possible way, I am satisfied that, to continue to live in England, even in the quiet way in which we are going on, *without splendour, and without show, nothing short of doubling the seven thousand pounds will do, REDUCTION BEING IMPOSSIBLE.*

It was clear that he would be obliged to sell his house for £51,300: if that failed, he would go and live on the Continent.

If my services are useful to my country, it surely becomes *those who have the power* to support me in substantiating those just claims I have for the very extensive losses and privations I have experienced, during the very long period of my professional servitude in the Colonies; and if this is not attainable, *it is a clear proof to me that they are not appreciated*; and under that impression I shall not scruple, in *due time*, to resume my retirement abroad, when the Duchess and myself shall have fulfilled our duties in establishing the English birth of my child, and giving it maternal nutriment on the soil of Old England; and which we shall certainly repeat, if Providence destines to give us any further increase of family.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, he decided to spend the winter at Sidmouth, 'in order,' he told Owen, 'that the Duchess may have the benefit of tepid sea bathing, and our infant that of sea air, on the fine coast of Devonshire, during the months of the year that are so odious in London.'<sup>3</sup> In December the move was made. With the new year, the Duke remembered another prophecy. In 1820, a fortune-teller had told him, two members of the Royal Family would die. Who would they be? He speculated on the various possibilities: the King, it was plain, could not live much longer; and the Duchess of York had been attacked by a mortal disease. Probably it would be the King and the Duchess of York; or

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2. Owen, *Journal*, No. 1, February, 1853, pp. 28-9.

3. *ibid.*, p. 31.

perhaps the King and the Duke of York; or the King and the Regent. He himself was one of the healthiest men in England.<sup>4</sup> 'My brothers,' he declared, 'are not so strong as I am; I have lived a regular life. I shall outlive them all. The crown will come to me and my children.'<sup>5</sup> He went out for a walk, and got his feet wet. On coming home, he neglected to change his stockings. He caught cold, inflammation of the lungs set in, and on 22 January he was a dying man. By a curious chance, young Dr Stockmar was staying in the house at the time; two years before, he had stood by the death-bed of the Princess Charlotte; and now he was watching the Duke of Kent in his agony. On Stockmar's advice, a will was hastily prepared. The Duke's earthly possessions were of a negative character; but it was important that the guardianship of the unwitting child, whose fortunes were now so strangely changing, should be assured to the Duchess. The Duke was just able to understand the document, and to append his signature. Having inquired whether his writing was perfectly clear, he became unconscious, and breathed his last on the following morning.<sup>6</sup> Six days later came the fulfilment of the second half of the gipsy's prophecy. The long, unhappy, and inglorious life of George the Third of England was ended.

## II

Such was the confusion of affairs at Sidmouth, that the Duchess found herself without the means of returning to London. Prince Leopold hurried down, and himself conducted his sister and her family, by slow and bitter stages, to Kensington. The widowed lady, in her voluminous blacks, needed all her equanimity to support her. Her prospects were more dubious than ever. She had £6,000 a year of her own; but her husband's debts loomed before her like a mountain. Soon she learnt that the Duchess of Clarence was once more expecting a child. What had she to look forward to in England! Why should she remain in a foreign country, among strangers, whose language she could not speak, whose customs she could not understand? Surely it would be best to

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4. Croker, Vol. I, p. 155.

5. Stockmar, p. 113.

6. *ibid.*, pp. 114-15.



return to Amorbach, and there, among her own people, bring up her daughters in economical obscurity. But she was an inveterate optimist; she had spent her life in struggles, and would not be daunted now. And besides, she adored the baby. '*C'est mon bonheur, mes délices, mon existence,*' she declared; the darling should be brought up as an English princess, whatever lot awaited her. Prince Leopold came forward nobly with an offer of an additional £3,000 a year; and the Duchess remained at Kensington.<sup>7</sup>

The child herself was extremely fat, and bore a remarkable resemblance to her grandfather. '*C'est l'image du feu Roi!*' exclaimed the Duchess. '*C'est le Roi Georges en jupons,*' echoed the surrounding ladies, as the little creature waddled with difficulty from one to the other.<sup>8</sup>

Before long, the world began to be slightly interested in the nursery of Kensington. When, early in 1821, the Duchess of Clarence's second child, the Princess Elizabeth, died within three months of its birth, the interest increased. Great forces and fierce antagonisms seemed to be moving, obscurely, about the royal cradle. It was a time of faction and anger, of violent repression and profound discontent. A powerful movement, which had for long been checked by adverse circumstances, was now spreading throughout the country. New passions, new desires, were abroad; or rather, old passions and old desires, reincarnated with a new potency: love of freedom, hatred of injustice, hope for the future of man. The mighty still sat proudly in their seats, dispensing their ancient tyranny; but a storm was gathering out of the darkness, and already there was lightning in the sky. But the vastest forces must needs operate through frail human instruments; and it seemed for many years as if the great cause of English liberalism hung upon the life of the little girl at Kensington. She alone stood between the country and her terrible uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, the hideous embodiment of reaction. Inevitably, the Duchess of Kent threw in her lot with her husband's party; Whig leaders, Radical agitators, rallied round her; she was intimate with the bold Lord Durham, she was on friendly terms with the redoubtable O'Connell himself. She received

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7. *Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 15, 257-8; Grey, App. A.

8. Granville, Vol. I, pp. 168-9.

Wilberforce – though, to be sure, she did not ask him to sit down.<sup>9</sup> She declared in public that she put her faith in ‘the liberties of the People’.<sup>10</sup> It was certain that the young Princess would be brought up in the way that she should go; yet there, close behind the throne, waiting, sinister, was the Duke of Cumberland. Brougham, looking forward into the future in his scurrilous fashion, hinted at dreadful possibilities. ‘I never prayed so heartily for a Prince before,’ he wrote, on hearing that George IV had been attacked by illness.

If he had gone, all the troubles of these villains [the Tory Ministers] went with him, and they had Fred. I [the Duke of York] their own man for his life. . . . He (Fred. I) won’t live long either; that Prince of Blackguards, ‘Brother William’, is as bad a life, so we come in the course of nature to be assassinated by King Ernest I or Regent Ernest [the Duke of Cumberland].<sup>11</sup>

Such thoughts were not peculiar to Brougham; in the seething state of public feeling, they constantly leapt to the surface; and, even so late as the year previous to her accession, the Radical newspapers were full of suggestions that the Princess Victoria was in danger from the machinations of her wicked uncle.<sup>12</sup>

But no echo of these conflicts and forebodings reached the little Drina – for so she was called in the family circle – as she played with her dolls, or scampered down the passages, or rode on the donkey her uncle York had given her<sup>13</sup> along the avenues of Kensington Gardens. The fair-haired, blue-eyed child was idolized by her nurses, and her mother’s ladies, and her sister Feodora; and for a few years there was a danger, in spite of her mother’s strictness, of her being spoilt. From time to time, she would fly into a violent passion, stamp her little foot, and set everyone at defiance; whatever they might say, she would not learn her letters – no, she would not; afterwards, she was very sorry, and burst into tears; but her letters remained unlearned. When she was five years old, however, a change came, with the appearance of Fräulein Lehzen. This lady, who was the daughter of a Hanoverian

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9. Wilberforce, *William*, Vol. V, pp. 71–2.

10. *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 17.

11. Creevey, Vol. I, pp. 297–8.

12. Jerrold, *Early Court*, pp. 15–17.

13. *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 10.

clergyman and had previously been the Princess Feodora's governess, soon succeeded in instilling a new spirit into her charge. At first, indeed, she was appalled by the little Princess's outbursts of temper; never in her life, she declared, had she seen such a passionate and naughty child. Then she observed something else; the child was extraordinarily truthful; whatever punishment might follow, she never told a lie.<sup>14</sup> Firm, very firm, the new governess yet had the sense to see that all the firmness in the world would be useless, unless she could win her way into little Drina's heart. She did so, and there were no more difficulties. Drina learnt her letters like an angel; and she learnt other things as well. The Baroness de Späth taught her how to make little cardboard boxes and decorate them with tinsel and painted flowers;<sup>15</sup> her mother taught her religion. Sitting in the pew every Sunday morning, the child of six was seen listening in wrapt attention to the clergyman's endless sermon, for she was to be examined upon it in the afternoon.<sup>16</sup> The Duchess was determined that her daughter, from the earliest possible moment, should be prepared for her high station in a way that would commend itself to the most respectable; her good, plain, thrifty German mind recoiled with horror and amazement from the shameless junketings at Carlton House; Drina should never be allowed to forget for a moment the virtues of simplicity, regularity, propriety, and devotion. The little girl, however, was really in small need of such lessons, for she was naturally simple and orderly, she was pious without difficulty, and her sense of propriety was keen. She understood very well the niceties of her own position. When, a child of six, Lady Jane Ellice was taken by her grandmother to Kensington Palace, she was put to play with the Princess Victoria, who was the same age as herself. The young visitor, ignorant of etiquette, began to make free with the toys on the floor, in a way which was a little too familiar; but 'You must not touch those,' she was quickly told, 'they are mine; and I may call you Jane, but you must not call me Victoria.'<sup>17</sup> The Princess's most constant playmate was Victoire, the daughter of Sir John Conroy, the

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14. *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 14; *Girlhood*, Vol. I, p. 280.

15. Crawford, p. 6.      16. Smith, pp. 21-2.

17. *Cornhill Magazine*, LXXV, p. 730.