

QUEEN
VICTORIA

LYTTON
STRACHEY

QUEEN VICTORIA

LYTTON
STRACHEY

AN HBJ MODERN CLASSIC
HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH, PUBLISHERS

San Diego New York London



Copyright 1921 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

Copyright renewed 1949 by James Strachey

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced
or transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording,
or any information storage and retrieval system,
without permission in writing
from the publisher.

Requests for permission to make copies of
any part of the work should be mailed to:

Copyrights and Permissions Department,
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, Orlando, Florida 32887.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Strachey, Lytton, 1880-1932.

Queen Victoria/by Lytton Strachey.

p. cm.—(An HBJ modern classic)

Reprint. Originally published:

New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, c1921.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-15-175695-3

1. Victoria, Queen of Great Britain, 1819-1901.

2. Great Britain—History—Victoria, 1837-1901.

3. Great Britain—Kings and rulers—Biography. I. Title. II. Series

DA554.S7 1989

941.081'092—dc20

[B] 89-34971

Designed by Michael Farmer

Printed in the United States of America

U V W X Y

CONTENTS

I	Antecedents	1
II	Childhood	18
III	Lord Melbourne	52
IV	Marriage	99
V	Lord Palmerston	152
VI	Last Years of Prince Consort	189
VII	Widowhood	222
VIII	Mr. Gladstone and Lord Beaconsfield	245
IX	Old Age	275
X	The End	314
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	319
	INDEX	323

I

ANTECEDENTS

I

On November 6, 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

I

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.¹

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 back-

¹ Greville, II, 326-8; Stockmar, chap. i, 86; Knight, I, chaps. xv-xviii and Appendix, and II, chap. i.

wards and forwards across the Channel. In January 1816 he was invited to England, and in May the marriage took place.¹

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;² 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."³

¹ Grey, 384, 386-8; *Letters*, II, 40.

² Grey, 375-86.

³ *Letters*, I, 216, 222-3; II, 39-40; Stockmar, 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 November 5, 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 realise 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.¹

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

¹ Stockmar, *Biographische Skizze*, and cap. iii.

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,¹ 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 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.² They had no children.

¹ Creevey, I, 264, 272: "Prinny has let loose his belly, which now reaches his knees; otherwise he is said to be well," 279.

² Greville, I, 5-7.

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.¹ 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.² 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.³ 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 blonde wig, chattered and fidgeted a great deal, and was unmarried.⁴

Besides his seven sons, George III had five surviving daughters. Of these, two—the Queen of Württemberg

¹ Greville, IV, 2.

² Stockmar, 95; Creevey, I, 148; Greville, I, 228; Lieven, 183-4.

³ Crawford, 24.

⁴ Crawford, 80, 113.

and the Duchess of Gloucester—were married and childless. The three unmarried princesses—Augusta, Elizabeth, and Sophia—were all over forty.

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 some one said who knew him well "*reglé 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 Co-operation—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 benefit, 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.¹

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

¹ Stockmar, 112-3; *Letters*, I, 8; Crawford, 27-30; Owen, 193-4, 197-8, 199, 229.

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. 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 any 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 enquired 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 £1000; 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."¹

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 May 29, 1818. On June 11, 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

¹ Creevey, I, 267-71.