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## The Independent Reign of Queen Victoria

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**The Independent Reign of Queen Victoria**

by  
**Emilee Serwan**  
**HIS 490 History Honors Thesis**

**Department of History**  
**Providence College**  
**Fall 2018**



**To my Friends and Family**

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge and thank my family for their support and love throughout my life and college career. I would never have been able to have the opportunities I have, including to produce this thesis, without them. I specifically want to thank my parents for making my college experience possible, for encouraging me to challenge myself and for their constant unconditional love.

I would also like to thank my friends here at Providence College. Their encouragement, optimism, loyalty and support has been essential to my success here at school. I greatly appreciate all the late nights listening to me go on about Queen Victoria for months and the laughter they have brought to my life.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Holland and Dr. Illuzzi for their assistance with this project. Thank you Dr. Holland for being there at every step of this process, helping me to narrow my thesis topic, advising me on organization and on what points to draw out more, for editing several versions of my work, for keeping me on task and for your positive outlook. Your insight and guidance has been indispensable. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with you. Thank you Dr. Illuzzi for editing my work with such a keen eye. Your suggestions and edits have helped to make this work the very best it can be.

## **Introduction**

Queen Victoria is one of the most well-known monarchs in both English and global history due to the extent of her empire, her personal achievements and for being the second longest reigning monarch in England. However, many have questioned if this reign was hers or if she was actually a figurehead, instead, controlled by the men in her life. These influential men include Victoria's maternal uncle King Leopold of the Belgians, her first prime minister, William Lamb, second Viscount Melbourne and her beloved husband Prince Albert of Saxe-Cobourg and Gotha. In analyzing Victoria's life and studying her diaries and letters, as well as, the writings of people surrounding her, it is evident that her reign was ultimately led out of her own control and independently. This is despite a brief period of dependence found throughout the majority of her marriage as a result of her trust and devotion to her husband, Albert's sexist views on women and power, and the difficulties Victoria faced surrounding the birth of their nine children. However, in widowhood, the remaining forty years of her sixty-four-year reign, Victoria was once again independent and re-found the confidence she once lost. When looking at her reign holistically, it can be clearly understood as an independent reign.

Queen Victoria was born May 24, 1819 to the English Prince Edward, Duke of Kent and his German bride Victoria, Duchess of Kent and former Princess of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld. Upon the birth of Victoria, the Duke looked with pride upon his first born child, a squirming little girl. While those around him assured him that another child, and a son at that, would soon arrive the Duke was very much pleased with his daughter. He would later boast to his friends "look at her

well, for she will be Queen of England.”<sup>1</sup> Little did the Duke truly know, his small little girl would indeed one day be queen, and one of the most powerful and longest reigning monarchs England had ever seen at that. Only eight months after Victoria’s birth the Duke became very ill with pneumonia and died, leaving the small infant Victoria without her father and prompting her search for a father figure well into her adulthood despite her desire to be independent. Victoria’s rise to the throne was not originally expected as her father was the fourth son of King George III. However, after the failure Edward’s older brothers to produce heirs, or heirs that lived long enough to see themselves on the throne, the crown fell upon the head of the eighteen-year-old Victoria in 1837.

Several historians have questioned if Victoria ruled on her own right as opposed to being controlled by those around her. Many source this doubt and questioning on her personal ability to rule. Most authors state that the Princess had an appropriate education fit for a monarch, however, others feel that the secluded nature of her upbringing stunted her growth in other aspects. Giles St. Aubyn, who wrote on the Queen in 1992, stated that “her solitary upbringing had retarded her development and in 1837 her emotions were still those of a school girl.”<sup>2</sup> St. Aubyn argues that while Victoria may have been adequately educated, her social skills were extremely underdeveloped, so much so that he believes that this resulted in her immense dependence and worshiping nature over Lord Melbourne, as well as, her dependency on other men in her life to guide her through social and regal obligations. In comparison, other historians emphasize how Victoria’s education and upbringing set her up to be prepared for the throne and

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Giles St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 76.



encouraged her to treasure to her independence. One supporter of Queen Victoria's abilities as queen from the start and the desire for independence her childhood brought her is Julia Baird. Baird in her 2016 text emphasizes Victoria's desire to be independent in her first moments as queen and even starts out her text with the bold statement "she was ready" despite the fact that when Victoria was only eighteen and her feet could hardly touch the floor when sitting on the throne.<sup>3</sup> When assessing Victoria's diaries, her desire for independence is even more compelling than many historians give her credit for. For example, her very first entry as queen emphasizes Victoria's sense of independence as she insisted on entering the room for her meeting with her ministers unaccompanied. In this she states "I went down and held a Council in the red saloon. I went in of course quite alone."<sup>4</sup>

While entries and letters such as these clearly illustrate Victoria's desire to rule on her own and apart from those who had controlled her in her past, some historians still argue that Victoria was heavily controlled. Victoria's maternal uncle Leopold is among those accused of controlling the young Queen. St. Aubyn argues that Victoria "showed a pathetic devotion to her uncle in whom she reposed unstinting trust."<sup>5</sup> St. Aubyn felt that Victoria was intensely loyal and influenced by her uncle, especially in the years before she came to the throne and in her first years as queen. This theory is likely sourced from interpreting Victoria's praise of her uncle and their closeness as signs of blind loyalty and obedience. Leopold and Victoria wrote each other

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<sup>3</sup> Julia Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire* (New York: Random House, 2016), 60-61 and x.

<sup>4</sup> Queen Victoria, "Journals of Queen Victoria," in *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria: A Selection From Her Majesty's Diaries Between the Years 1832 and 1840*, ed. Reginald Balliol Brett Viscount Esher, G.C.B., G.C.V.O. (New York: His Majesty the King and Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), 1:197

<sup>5</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 36.

regularly and he would often give her advice on her education and how to morally be a good monarch. Victoria greatly appreciated and valued her uncle's advice and looked to him as a father-like figure. However, Victoria was not controlled by Leopold despite what some historians have claimed. Victoria did often take her uncles advice but she refused to allow him to control her in matters of statecraft or obey all his requests. When looking at the letters Victoria and Leopold exchanged, they were typically always polite and affectionate but there are several cases in which Leopold seems to be seeking more information from his niece about political situations, giving her unsolicited advice, and asking for favors. In these instances, Victoria responds in her same friendly manner but refuses to give him what he wants. She clearly appreciated his advice when she asked for it, but if it appeared that Leopold was looking to interfere with her own political authority she quickly dismissed him and his requests. Lytton Strachey, one of the earliest biographers of Queen Victoria, supports the argument of Victoria's independence from Leopold in writing that Victoria's "attitude towards her uncle had never wavered for a moment. To all his advances she had presented an absolutely unyielding front," as "the foreign policy of England was not his province; it was hers and her ministers."<sup>6</sup>

Another man that is argued to have controlled Victoria is her first Prime Minister, a Whig politician by the name William Lamb, the Second Viscount Melbourne. Victoria was very impressed with Lord Melbourne from their very first interactions. Throughout their acquaintance Victoria would praise Melbourne in her diaries and letters effusively. She came to rely on him to aid her in navigating the new world of courtly life. He also served as a friend and companion to the young Queen. St. Aubyn recognized the closeness of the relationship between Victoria and

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<sup>6</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2012), 69.

Melbourne but felt that “her fondness for Lord Melbourne increased her dependence upon him.”<sup>7</sup> This dependence, he argues was strengthened by Victoria’s “school-girl” emotions that St. Aubyn felt she still had due to the effects of her sheltered upbringing. He continues to state that due to the Queen’s apparent immaturity, Victoria desired “a hero to worship and Melbourne fitted the bill.”<sup>8</sup> Other historians have also noted on this idea of a hero worshiping relationship between Victoria and Melbourne. One such is Strachey who stated that “if she is the heroine of the story, he is the hero.”<sup>9</sup> When analyzing Victoria’s letters, diaries and primary source accounts of her actions, it is evident that Victoria did have a very close relationship to Lord Melbourne and admired him greatly. However, these sources also demonstrate several examples of Victoria acting independently of Melbourne’s guidance when concerning things she cared about and when in defense of her own rights as a monarch. One such example is the case of the Bedchamber Crisis of 1839 in which Victoria went against Melbourne’s advice believing she was acting in interest of her crown. She defended her actions in a letter stating “they want to deprive me of my ladies” and thus “they wish to treat me like a girl, but I will show them that I am Queen of England.”<sup>10</sup>

The third prominent gentleman, and the most influential in Victoria’s life, was her husband Prince Albert. The relationship between Victoria, Albert, and the crown is one of the most complex she faced and is riddled with contradictions. Victoria deeply loved Albert, more so than any other person in her life. She trusted unquestionably and thought he was an angel among

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<sup>7</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 60.

<sup>10</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 105.

men. This confidence and admiration set Victoria up to take to heart and believe almost everything Albert said, particularly when he was diminishing her confidence. Albert greatly struggled with the idea of women and power, and was discontent with not having more control and dominance over his wife of which he freely verbalized. Julia Baird also acknowledged this complexity in their relationship and reflected that as Victoria's "love and contentment grew, her confidence in herself wilted."<sup>11</sup> This combined with nine difficult and close pregnancies, Victoria did come to depend heavily on Albert to handle political matters. Some historians incorrectly argue that this dependence was due to Victoria's own desire to submit. Historian, Elizabeth Longford argues that "part of her longed to have Albert as her lord and master."<sup>12</sup> St. Aubyn argues similarly that Victoria had an "appetite for submission" which allowed Albert to dominate her in her political matters.

Victoria did struggle with trying to understand her place as both a wife and a monarch. The rules and expectations of society at the time expected women to be obedient and subservient to their husbands and the men in society. Victoria wanted to be the best wife she could to Albert and felt to be so she needed to obey these societal expectations. At the same time, Victoria also wanted to be the best queen she could be. This notion is illustrated in Victoria's diary entry from the day she was first named queen: "since it has pleased Providence to place me in this station, I shall do my utmost to fulfill my duty towards my country."<sup>13</sup> It was Victoria who successfully came to the throne by the design of Providence, not a man and Victoria was determined to fill the

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<sup>11</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 161.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:196.

role with dignity. It was her duty and responsibility not anyone else's. This determination to uphold her responsibilities strengthens the argument that Victoria would not have given up her authority or have been controlled by others without putting up some sort of fight. Early into her marriage and during her engagement, it is evident that Victoria sought to keep Albert as separated from politics as possible, further refuting the claims that Victoria sought to be controlled and was willingly depended upon Albert.

Albert's influence over Victoria only lasted less than a quarter of her entire reign as Albert died in 1861 at the age of 42, while Victoria reigned almost another forty years until 1901. Throughout this period of widowhood Victoria missed her beloved Albert terribly. She reacted by creating several memorials for him, dressing in mourning colors and reducing her presence in the public eye, much to the upset of the public. Many historians recognize this time period as one of personal growth for the Queen. St. Giles writes that "gradually after 1861 she became increasingly self-reliant and self-confident."<sup>14</sup> This time of widowhood should be seen as a resurgence of Victoria's confidence and self reliance that she had in the early years of her reign but now further strengthened by years of experience, as well as, the refusal to submit or be controlled again as she was under her marriage. Victoria did not see her marriage as being oppressive to her ability to reign but she also acknowledged that she would never rely on another man again, for no one could be as good as her Albert was. In his absence she grew stronger and more confident. It was in this time that Lytton Strachey believes Victoria retook ownership over her rule and that "England and the people of England, she knew it, she felt it, were, in some wonderful and yet quite simple manner, *hers*."<sup>15</sup> In these last forty years Victoria saw her

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<sup>14</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 368.

<sup>15</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 224.

country through several wars, international political conflicts, encouraged and married her relations into many of the royal houses of Europe and guided an empire that controlled almost a quarter of the world's population at its height. The argument that Victoria's reign can be classified as an independent one is strengthened by the fact that the majority of her time spent on the throne was compromised of both these forty years of renewed confidence, as well as, the first few years of treasured independence and freedom when she first became queen. In addition, the time Victoria spent early in her marriage trying to keep Albert separate from politics illustrates her attempts at independence despite the pitfall that came after. Taking all this into consideration, it is justified to argue that Victoria's reign was in fact an independent one.

## **Leopold: Uncle, Father and Almost King**

Who was Queen Victoria? A daughter, a wife, a mother, a queen and an empress. All titles she possessed but to truly answer the question one must first look at her character to understand her actions and motivations in these roles. Victoria's character, both innate and guided through her upbringing, worked together as tools to prepare her for her destiny as the head of state and for the responsibilities associated with wearing the crown. From a young age Victoria showed signs of a strong character displaying a profound sense of responsibility, national pride, and valuing honesty. Her strong will and fierce loyalty are reflected in her emotional intensity. As she assumed the throne at only the age of eighteen, Victoria was prepared as she could be, thanks to the manner in which she was raised and the education she received. This character and education set Victoria up to be a strong and capable ruler. Due to this education and Victoria's character, she did not need to depend on another to ensure the country ran successfully. She had the abilities and capabilities to be a strong ruler on her own. However, because Victoria was so young and inexperienced, she did seek out advice and support from others. Victoria ensured that this early reliance remained on her terms and did not take away from her independence as a monarch. One of the first people the Queen looked to for this advice was her uncle Leopold, the King of the Belgians.

While Victoria had not known she was in line for the throne until she was eleven, she had always known that she was special. It has been reported that even as a small child she knew she held a position of importance due to the gifts presented to her, the way people doted on her, and

how they would bow and curtsy before her.<sup>16</sup> She is reported to have told a childhood acquaintance that “I may call you Jane, but you must not call me Victoria.”<sup>17</sup> Such demonstrates her early understanding of her rank and class. However, upon learning just how important her position truly was, it is said that Victoria burst into tears.<sup>18</sup> While today many young girls dream of becoming a princess, this young girl saw it as almost a curse. The weight of the burden of the crown was clear to her when observing the toll it took on her relatives. Instead of drowning under the pressure or letting the sense of power go to her head, Victoria accepted her duty and took on a directed mindset to become a responsible monarch. This is clearly evident in her letter to her uncle, King Leopold of the Belgians, at age fifteen. In this letter she discusses her education, desire to learn and specifically how she is “fond of making tables of the Kings and Queens, as I go on, and I have lately finished one of the English Sovereigns and their consorts, as, of course, the history of my own country is one of my first duties.”<sup>19</sup>

Throughout her life, Victoria held a profound sense of duty and responsibility towards her people. As she grew, she began to more keenly feel how important her preparation for her role as a monarch was as expressed in her letters and diaries. Upon her eighteenth birthday she wrote “I shall from this day take the firm resolution to study with renewed assiduity, to keep my attention

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<sup>16</sup> Queen Victoria, “Memoir of Queen Victoria’s Early Years,” in *The Letters of Queen Victoria; A Selection From Her Majesty’s Correspondence Between the Years 1837 and 1861*, eds. Arthur Christopher Benson, M.A and Viscount Esher (New York: His Majesty the King, 1907), 1:19.

<sup>17</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 22 October 1834, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection From Her Majesty’s Correspondence Between the Years 1837 and 1861*, eds. Arthur Christopher Benson, M.A and Viscount Esher, (New York: His Majesty the King, 1907), 1:50.



always well fixed on whatever I am about, and to strive to become every day less trifling and more fit for what, if Heaven wills it, I'm some day to be!"<sup>20</sup> Victoria recognized the seriousness of her coming duty as queen. In addition, she knew that turning eighteen meant that a regency would no longer be in place. Now when King William IV died, Victoria would rule on her own and only relying on those of her choice as she saw fit, as opposed to once again being under the thumb of her mother and Sir John Conroy. Little did she know that less than a month into her eighteenth year the crown would fall onto her head. On the day of her ascension to the throne Victoria wrote in a manner that evidently conveyed her deep sense of duty towards her people and a profound understanding of what her responsibilities were. "Since it has pleased Providence to place me in this station, I shall do my utmost to fulfill my duty towards my country" and "that very few have more real good will and more real desire to do what is fit and right than I have."<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, the young Queen places emphasis upon the role of Providence in her position. This references how her title includes being the head of the church, and having religious responsibilities. She acknowledges how the will of God himself is active in her life and her respect for His decisions in making her the queen as opposed to anyone else, especially not a more experienced male. This notion of being selected by God strengthened Victoria's own determination to do right by the Lord and take on the responsibilities of the position as best she could on her own. Victoria also emphasizes her desire to do good in her role as queen, illustrating her responsible and honorable nature as well as her dedication and pride for her country.

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<sup>20</sup> Princess Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:190.

<sup>21</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:196.

In memorial of her departed father, the Duke of Kent, Victoria maintained a deep sense of respect for him and sought to keep a part of him close to her in her memory as such she noted that “I was always told to consider myself a soldier’s child.”<sup>22</sup> Victoria had a great respect and dedication towards the military and the national pride they brought with them. At the start of the Crimean War in 1853, Victoria is remembered standing on the balcony of Buckingham Palace waving off troops and later wrote that she found “it was a touching and beautiful sight”<sup>23</sup> During the same war the Queen wrote, “The conduct of our dear noble *Troops* is beyond praise; it is quite heroic, and really I feel a pride to have such *Troops*, which is only equaled by my grief for their sufferings.”<sup>24</sup> Victoria was very much moved by the patriotism of those in the military and had a great sense of appreciation and pride for the people of her nation who were so dedicated to protect it. She felt so strongly about this representation of devotion that she wrote to Princess Augusta of Prussia “I regret exceedingly not to be a man & be able to fight in the war.”<sup>25</sup>

Not only was Victoria appreciative and proud of her subjects in the military, but all of those in her domain. When reflecting on her coronation and the citizens that lined the procession to and from Westminster Abbey, Victoria proclaimed “I really cannot say *how* proud I feel to be the Queen of *such a Nation*.”<sup>26</sup> Victoria knew that her role as queen was more than the glittering crown but was in service of the people of the nation, a people she cared for deeply and had a great deal

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<sup>22</sup> Walter L. Arnstein, “The Warrior Queen: Reflections on Victoria and Her World.” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 30, no. 1 (1998): 5, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/4052381?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4052381?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>23</sup> Arnstein, “Warrior Queen,” 9.

<sup>24</sup> Arnstein, “Warrior Queen,” 9.

<sup>25</sup> Arnstein, “Warrior Queen,” 10.

<sup>26</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:357.

of admiration for. This was not the only occasion the Queen expressed this appreciation. When after attending the Lord Mayor's dinner in 1837 Victoria once again reflected on the crowds that gathered in seeing her come and go from the dinner. "I feel *deeply grateful* for this display of affection and unfeigned loyalty and *attachment* from my good people. It is much more than I deserve, and I shall do my utmost to render myself worthy of all this love and affection."<sup>27</sup> Out of her love and loyalty towards her nation and its people Victoria was determined to rule in a fair manner, that would please and support her dearly beloved people.

Victoria also displayed her sense of responsibility in smaller actions. Reflecting on her childhood Victoria recalled how she was very remorseful after her outbursts against staff and always begged for forgiveness afterward. "Everyone should own their fault in a kind way to any one, be he or she the lowest- if one has been rude or injured them by word or deed, especially those below you."<sup>28</sup> This illustrates Victoria's value on the concept of being responsible for one's actions and honestly admitting fault when necessary. She believed that this value was carried from her childhood into adulthood. Her emphasis on the necessity for apology even to those in positions below her demonstrates her position as a queen caring for each subject; it shows a deeply compassionate and honest woman. Another example of her sense of responsibility is how upon her coronation day she insisted on giving her dog a bath after the ceremony.<sup>29</sup> The irony is almost comical to think of a newly appointed queen, head of the government and church, just removed from a glittering ceremony immediately proceeded to

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<sup>27</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:235.

<sup>28</sup> Queen Victoria, *Memoir of Queen Victoria's Early Years*, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 5.

bathe her small lap dog. Even this responsibility was deemed important to the Queen. This illustrates how unlikely it would be for Victoria to willingly hand over the responsibilities of the crown to another if she would not even hand over her responsibilities as a dog owner. There was no duty she was willing to neglect.

Victoria's education was largely organized by her mother, Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld and Duchess of Kent. The Duchess of Kent, was intent on guaranteeing her daughter was being educated properly for her possible future as the Queen of England. The Duchess herself was German and wanted to ensure her daughter was raised in England and under an approved education system to eliminate any objections to her daughter's reign in the future and to protect her own reputation. She put particular emphasis on her daughter's religious learning. When Victoria was eleven the Duchess wrote to the Bishops of London and Lincoln to receive their opinions on the educational path the Princess had been put on. In the letters the Duchess notes that she attends the majority of the lessons, and vouches for Lehzen's character, the Princesses' governess.<sup>30</sup> She also notes that Mr. Davys had been put in charge of Victoria's religious education.<sup>31</sup> Historian, Giles St. Aubyn has credited the Reverend George Davys with being the Princess's central educator. His principle mission was to educate the Princess in becoming a earnest Christian and was selected for this task due to his background in the faith as a fellow of Christ's College and a Vicar. St. Aubyn notes that Davys' regimen for the Princess was very far reaching including geography, history, religion and Latin. Victoria was also taught English, French, German, poetry, music and drawing

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<sup>30</sup> Victoria, Duchess of Kent, to Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London, and John Kaye, Bishop of Lincoln, 1830, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:20.

<sup>31</sup> Victoria, Duchess of Kent, to Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London, and John Kaye, Bishop of Lincoln, 1830, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:21.

by others. This education was even considered to be better than what most boys around Victoria's age would have received.<sup>32</sup> This only furthers the stance that the Princess was properly educated for her role. Thus she was not required to depend on others for most things.

Continuing in the Duchess' letter, she vouches for Victoria's character as well, noting that "her adherence to truth is so marked a character that I feel no apprehension of that Bulwark being broken down" and that while Victoria was not yet aware she may be queen she knew what it meant "that a Sovereign should live for others."<sup>33</sup> Even at age eleven Victoria was notably honorable in character and held a sound set of morals with truth at the forefront. Upon the examination of Victoria, the Bishops found themselves very awestruck with her understanding of the scripture and its moral teachings. They were most impressed by her knowledge on English history and the chronology of it despite her young age.<sup>34</sup> The Bishops stated that they were very satisfied with Victoria's education for a future monarch and only suggested that as she aged the material would grow in depth, a occurrence in any education system. This was clearly a positive sign for the Duchess, but she was not completely satisfied either and sought further opinions. The Duchess then sent the correspondence between herself and the Bishops to the Bishop of Canterbury for his approval. After his examination of the Princess, the Bishop declared that he too completely approved of the Princess's education, further exemplifying that Victoria's education was more than adequate in preparing her for the crown.

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<sup>32</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 17-19.

<sup>33</sup> Victoria, Duchess of Kent, to Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London, and John Kaye, Bishop of Lincoln, 1830, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:21-22.

<sup>34</sup> Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London, and John Kaye, Bishop of Lincoln, to Victoria, Duchess of Kent, 1830, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:22.

The Princess's upbringing was not perfect however, despite her education being up to standards. She was an incredibly sheltered child, due to her mother's and Sir John Conroy's rules. Sir John Conroy (1786-1854) was close to both the Duke and Duchess of Kent, acting as an equerry, an officer of the household, upon their marriage. Conroy believed that his wife Elizabeth was the Duke of Kent's daughter and deserving of a higher position in society. This prompted his desire to control the Duchess of Kent and her daughter Princess Victoria. Being one of the closest people to the Duchess since her arrival in England granted Conroy unparalleled control over her due to her faith and comfort in him.<sup>35</sup> Conroy worked diligently to control the household and hopefully the future queen, by establishing rules within the house referred to as the Kensington System. These rules limited Victoria's outside influence in the hope that she would grow to become extremely dependent on the Duchess of Kent and Conroy. These sheltering rules extended so far as to forbidding Victoria to descend stairs without holding an adult's hand and sharing a bedroom with her mother until the day she became queen.<sup>36</sup> She had limited interactions with people her own age as her closest companions consisted of governesses, and family members. These rules also included restricting her allowed playmates to her half sister, Princess Feodora, from the Duchess' previous marriage, and to Conroy's daughter Victoria. Under this system, the Duchess and Conroy controlled Victoria's daily schedule, education, and her travels.<sup>37</sup> Conroy hoped that

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<sup>35</sup> Oxford University Press, 2004 "Conroy, Sir John Ponsonby, first baronet (1786–1854), courtier," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14 Apr. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-37309>.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, (London: Haper Collins Publishers, 2000), 27.

<sup>37</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 45.

King William would pass before Victoria turned eighteen so that she would require a regent. That regent would hopefully become the Duchess of Kent who Conroy could easily control. Once Victoria turned eighteen and the chance of the regency was dismissed, Conroy urged Victoria to name him her private secretary, but the Princess's strong will and hatred for the man thwarted his plans.<sup>38</sup> It is suggested that this upbringing caused some shyness in the Queen that she never quite overcame during her reign as queen.<sup>39</sup> By no means was this deeply damaging, but it did impact her self confidence when making speeches.

It can also be considered that while this sheltered life may have made the Princess a bit uneasy in larger groups, it did allow for her moral sense to be untainted, as well as, her appreciation and desire for independence to grow. Life at court at the time was filled with scandal. Her uncles, the kings before her, lived in luxury and had displayed several flaws. George IV and his younger brother Frederick both lived separate from their wives, and spent money outrageously. William IV, Victoria's predecessor, had ten children out of wedlock with an actress before marrying her Aunt Adelaide to cover his debts. Even Victoria's own father created scandal by leaving her with significant debts. Keeping Victoria away from people such as these for the majority of her upbringing assured the Duchess that her daughter would not be corrupted. Instead the Duchess instilled in Victoria strict rules of propriety, honesty and morals.

Victoria's greatest aid in surviving both her mother and Conroy was Louise Lehzen. Lehzen was born in Hanover in 1784 and was the daughter of a well respected pastor. She first came to the Kent's household to serve as the governess for Princess Feodore. In 1824 she was named as Victoria's governess as well, becoming her constant companion and ally against the

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<sup>38</sup> *Oxford Dictionary*, "Conroy, Sir John Ponsonby."

<sup>39</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 60.

plans of Sir John Conroy. King George IV granted Lehzen a Hanoverian barony in 1827. Both King George IV and William IV appreciated Lehzen's presence as she acted as a barrier and protector between Victoria and Conroy's influence. Victoria grew to love Lehzen and saw her as almost another mother. Lehzen remained in Victoria's life as her dearest friend until she was asked to retire after Victoria's marriage in 1842.<sup>40</sup>

When combining Victoria's moral compass and general character with her bishop approved education and advice from her Uncle Leopold it can be assured that she was a ready for the throne as she could be at eighteen. True, she had little experience as she was often removed from court and grew up very sheltered, but her situation did not stop Victoria from diving into her studies and doing what she could within her bounds to prepare for her future duty that she took on with a great sense of responsibility. A final argument for why Victoria can be considered prepared for the throne and determined to rule on her own is found in her own words. In the days before her she became queen, the young Princess knew it was only a matter of time before men would show up to her door, bow before her and announce both her Uncle William's death and her own ascension. During these days she wrote to King Leopold "I look forward to the event which it seems is likely to occur soon, with calmness and quietness; I am not alarmed at it, and yet I do not suppose myself quite equal to it all; I trust, however, that with *good will, honesty and courage* I shall not, at all events, *fail*."<sup>41</sup> Victoria knew what was expected of her, and took her uncle's and mother's lessons on character to heart as guides to being a successful sovereign. It is interesting how she expresses

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<sup>40</sup> K. D. Reynolds, 2004 "Lehzen, (Johanna Clara) Louise, Baroness Lehzen in the Hanoverian nobility (1784–1870), royal governess," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14 Apr. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-37665>.

<sup>41</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 19 June 1837, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:95.



her doubts as well. She does not assume that she is completely ready for the task at hand. Her modesty reflects her honest and responsible character. She knows she is not unprepared, and that she has good intentions and a solid character guiding her, but there is much still to learn at the same time that will come with time and experience.

Her success is clearly found in the response she received on her first privy council meeting. This event marked one of her first actions as queen in which she was to perform the swearing in of the Privy Councillors and make various declarations. This ceremony and gathering was held on the very day Victoria found out she was queen, creating a great amount of pressure. This was the moment for her to sink or swim and make a strong first impression. However, despite this pressure Victoria noted in her diary that “ I was not at all nervous and had the satisfaction of hearing that people were satisfied with what I had done and how I had done it.”<sup>42</sup> Victoria surprised many of council members in her success. Charles Greville, a clerk to the Privy Council, reflected that “There never was anything like the first impression she produced,” and that “It was very extraordinary, and something far beyond what was looked for.” In addition, the Duke of Wellington, a Whig politician in attendance, recalled that “she not merely filled her chair, she filled the room.”<sup>43</sup> The council was in awe of the small woman, of her strength, poise and promise in her ability as sovereign. This clearly illustrates Victoria’s success in her preparation and ability to fill the role on her own. The council admitted that she is young and inexperienced, but they were impressed by the maturity they saw in her, and in her ability to command the room. In the years of ruling ahead of her, she came to lean on various people for better or for worse while the number of those depending on her grows and grows.

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<sup>42</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:198.

<sup>43</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 62.

One of Victoria's earliest influencers and advisors is her Uncle Leopold. He was her mother's brother and the widower of Princess Charlotte who was Victoria's cousin and the English King George IV's only child. Charlotte was to become queen but she died in child birth, sparking the need for Victoria's father to marry and produce an heir when his elder brothers had not. Leopold was born in 1790 and was destined to be a king come hell or high water. His first chance was upon his marriage to Princess Charlotte when he came as close to an English monarch as possible. However, her sudden death prevented the opportunity. In 1830 France, Britain, and Russia offered Leopold the title of King of Greece, but seeing this was not a popularly supported offer, Leopold declined. Later that same year a rebellion in the Netherlands resulted in the establishment of Belgium, Leopold once again received an invitation of kingship, which he accepted becoming Leopold I, the first King of the Belgians.<sup>44</sup> Despite this new role, Leopold felt a great sense of responsibility to his niece Victoria. Throughout her life, Leopold was a very frequent correspondent and mentor to the Princess and later Queen. He would write to her with advice on her education, marriage prospects, as well as, on the expectations and character of a good monarch. In Leopold, Victoria found an inkling of the father figure she longed to have in her life and was in search for.

Despite the geographical distance between them, Victoria confided in Leopold a great deal and often sought his advice on political matters. Leopold provided Victoria with compelling advice on becoming a monarch even when she was just thirteen. At that point he advised her studies should be based around how to be a good queen and that "a good heart and a trusty and honorable

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<sup>44</sup> Janet L. Polasky 2004 "Leopold I (1790–1865), king of the Belgians," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14 Apr. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-41227>.

character are amongst the most indispensable qualifications for that position.”<sup>45</sup> Such advice clearly would have encouraged Victoria to focus on her studies and observe and check her behavior. The following year, he advised her to guard herself from selfishness and vanity as both would be used against her once on the throne, would turn the people against her, and create general unhappiness in her own life. As a cure he recommended that she continually examine herself and her character for such flaws.<sup>46</sup> As a monarch himself, his advice was invaluable as he speaks from experience and with genuine care for his niece and the country.

Leopold often understood her concerns for independence and provided suggestions to achieve such. This advice was mostly written as suggestions not orders, demonstrating his trust in her own opinion and his overall respect for his niece. On the days approaching Victoria’s eighteenth birthday, Leopold wrote to give the Princess advice on the possibility of her forming her own establishment or household if the King of England offered. He recognized that having Victoria’s mother around would “render a *complete* independent establishment perhaps matter of *real* inconvenience.”<sup>47</sup> Leopold recognized, respected, and supported Victoria’s desire to be independent of her mother. His continuous desire was for his niece to be independent of and uncontrolled by those around her, even his own sister. Leopold advises the household Victoria should establish, providing suggestions of certain people for each role and insisting that the English king allow Victoria to choose who will fill each position.

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<sup>45</sup> Leopold the King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 22 May 1832, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:43.

<sup>46</sup> Leopold the King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 21 May 1833, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1: 46.

<sup>47</sup> Leopold the King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 11 April 1837, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:83.

Upon learning of the English King's severe condition Leopold wrote to his niece instructing her on how to address the Prime Minister and the cabinet after being declared queen. He tries to build her confidence by suggesting that the liberal Whig party would be very responsive to her since they were aware her father had Whig sympathies and her Uncle Ernest, the Duke of Cumberland, was very opposed to the Whig party and was the next heir until Victoria had children of her own. If Cumberland came to the throne the party would likely face difficulties working with him and maintaining their power so they were inclined to appeal to Victoria. Leopold also advised her to emphasize her religious dedication and to look out for Queen Maria II of Portugal and Queen Isabella II of Spain whom were both facing dissenters against their rights as women to their respective thrones.<sup>48</sup> Victoria and Leopold often discussed the two queens of the peninsula with concern in their letters and Leopold sought to encourage his niece try to protect them in international affairs as they were all very young and faced concerns about their rights to the throne due to their sex. Victoria's right to the crown was not called into question which put her at a position to protect these other two queens who were facing such issues. Leopold felt that it was Victoria's duty as a monarch, particularly as a female monarch, to protect others in guarding their sovereign rights. In response, Victoria thanked her uncle profusely for his "most *wholesome, prudent, sound* and *excellent* advice" noting that "I shall make use of it, and follow it."<sup>49</sup> Victoria greatly appreciated, acknowledged and enacted her Uncle's advice, especially when entering into this nerve wracking next step in her life, but she was not willing to be controlled by him.

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<sup>48</sup> Leopold the King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 17 June 1837, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:93-94.

<sup>49</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 19 June 1837, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:95.

This reliance and influence only lasted for so long, as once she was on the throne Victoria began to reduce the degree in which she confided in Leopold. When Victoria became queen, Leopold wrote to Victoria with the advice or instruction that “before you decide on anything important I should be glad if you would consult me” as “to retrace or back out of a measure is on the contrary extremely *difficult*, and almost always *injurious* to the highest authority.”<sup>50</sup> Leopold hoped his niece would become reliant on him even in her political matters, as she was in regards to her education and character development. Leopold sought to have a hand in politics to ensure his young niece was doing justice to the role. In addition, Leopold hoped that by having control over Victoria, he could ensure that he had England’s support in international affairs and could encourage her to enact international policy decisions that would benefit him. This hope, though is not to take away from the genuine care he had for his niece. In the end however, Victoria refused to talk politics with her uncle a little over a year after becoming queen, stating that she was fearful of changing their “present delightful and familiar correspondence into a formal and stiff discussion upon political matters, which would not be agreeable to either of us.”<sup>51</sup> This change of mind may also reflect a fear of an outsider trying to control English politics, a claim that Leopold firmly disagreed with. He stated that his only desire in contributing advice was to aid Victoria. He had nothing to gain from English politics, only seeking her affection and prosperity.<sup>52</sup> This interaction also illustrates how Victoria sought to be independent from those who influenced her throughout

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<sup>50</sup> Leopold the King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 23 June 1837, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:102.

<sup>51</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 5 December 1838, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:173.

<sup>52</sup> Leopold the King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 21 September 1839, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:234.

her childhood. Victoria looked to Leopold for advice but it was on her own terms and when she felt her independence as a ruler was being encroached she put her foot down, illustrating her own strength and abilities as a queen.

Their relationship was one of mentor and student. Leopold gave her advice and support but she did not find herself expressing a dependency on him. She appreciated and even requested his advice at times, but she did not need him in the way she did the other advisors in her life. This does not mean that Leopold did not play a role in influencing her. One of the clearest examples is of Leopold's influence in Victoria's marriage to Prince Albert. As the uncle of both, King Leopold introduced the two royals believing them to be a good fit together. Leopold also saw his nephew as an opportunity to put someone he approved of and trusted him in the position of Victoria's closest confidant, as Leopold felt himself was losing influence over the young girl. When hints and assumptions of an engagement between the two became more evident in 1839, Victoria angrily wrote to her Uncle Leopold reminding him that no engagement was promised.<sup>53</sup> In a letter to Victoria, Leopold praised Albert and would put him in very favorable light. Suspecting her Uncle was trying to encourage Victoria to marry Albert she wrote to Leopold that she "may not have *feelings* for him which is requisite to ensure happiness."<sup>54</sup> She felt strongly that she was not yet ready to marry nor did she see herself being connected to Albert in that manner. Due to this she did not appreciate her uncle's attempts at pushing the two of them together and trying to control who and when she married. The Queen enjoyed the independence she had a single woman in a

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<sup>53</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 15 July 1839, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:224.

<sup>54</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 15 July 1839, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:224.

male position and hoped to hang onto this way of life for some time. Finally, she was alone, independent, and fulfilling a meaningful and empowering responsibility. Victoria wrote this letter in August 1839 and at Albert's arrival in October of the same year she was praising his beauty, declaring herself very much in love with him, and proposed.<sup>55</sup> Victoria had unexpectedly fallen deeply in love with Albert. This decision to marry was certainly her own as she was opposed to her uncle's encouragement months earlier, however Leopold has some influence as he was the one that encouraged the two to build a relationship. Leopold's plans to influence the Queen further through her husband failed though as Albert was not as willing to be under his uncle's thumb as Leopold had hoped. Leopold's influence was beginning to fade long before Victoria's marriage due to the Queen's first Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne and his blossoming relationship with Victoria.

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<sup>55</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 15 October 1839, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:238-239.

### **Lord Melbourne: Prime Minister and Mentor**

Once Victoria came to power as queen she was thrilled to be her own master and have daily responsibilities and duties that were meaningful and challenging. At the same time, life as a monarch and being at court was somewhat a new world for Victoria. To help guide her through this changing time was her first Prime Minister Lord Melbourne. Melbourne served as mentor and confidant to the young Queen. Many have suggested however, that their relationship was more than this and Melbourne controlled Victoria through his close relationship to her. This claim loses its validity when one assesses the various accounts of the Queen going against the advice of Lord Melbourne, exercising her own independence.

William Lamb, Viscount Melbourne was the acting Prime Minister at the time of Victoria's ascension to the throne. He was born the second son in March 1779, but after his brother's passing became the heir to the viscount title. Melbourne was a Whig politician for the entirety of his extensive political career. During this career he served as MP for Leominster from 1806 to 1812 and again from 1816-1829, the Secretary for Ireland from 1827 to 1828 and the Home Secretary from 1830 to 1834. This work eventually led to his greatest achievement of becoming the Prime Minister in 1834 under King William IV's reign. Melbourne then served as Prime Minister until 1841 except for a brief point in time when Sir Robert Peel, a Tory, served as Prime Minister for



five months after November in 1834.<sup>56</sup> Many have described Lord Melbourne as a very charming and handsome man with a calm temperament. He deeply enjoyed reading and was evidently a very intelligent man. Despite being in the more liberal Whig party, he seemed to have relatively conservative views. He did not seek to make many reforms but instead wanted to keep peace and order throughout the nation.<sup>57</sup> Melbourne was married to Lady Caroline Ponsonby who famously had an affair with the poet Lord Byron resulting in their separation in 1825 after twenty years of marriage. She later died in 1828.<sup>58</sup> The two had one son, George Augustus Fredrick, in 1807 who later died in 1836.<sup>59</sup> Their son was mentally handicapped, epileptic and required constant care.<sup>60</sup> The combination of Caroline's death, who Melbourne is said to have loved until her last breath, and the death of his only child deeply damaged Melbourne. It can be suggested that this loss left a void in Melbourne's life that could be filled by acting as a father figure towards Victoria. She could be the child he lost and he the father she never knew.

When assessing Victoria's diaries, letters, and other primary sources on the relationship between the monarch and Prime Minister, Melbourne clearly took on several defining roles in Victoria's life and reign. Not only was he her Prime Minister, a role that already put them in close proximity and frequent interaction, but he also acted as her advisor, private secretary, supporter,

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<sup>56</sup> "History of William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne," *Past Prime Ministers*, Accessed June 24, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/history/past-prime-ministers/william-lamb-2nd-viscount-melbourne>.

<sup>57</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 54-56.

<sup>58</sup> "History of William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne."

<sup>59</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 73.

<sup>60</sup> "History of William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne."

confidant and at times father figure. Their connection began almost as soon as she began her reign. As was customary, Melbourne came to meet the new queen as soon as she was notified of the former King's passing. After that June morning in 1837 of their first interaction as Prime Minister and Queen, Victoria reflected that "I like him very much and feel confidence in him. He is a very straightforward, honest, clever and good man."<sup>61</sup> These character traits deeply impressed the young Queen and encouraged her to put her trust in Lord Melbourne. Her reliance on him too was quickly formed during the first council meeting that same day. It is reported that during the ceremony she was "occasionally looking at Melbourne for instruction when She had any doubt what to do."<sup>62</sup> From the first day of her reign she felt Melbourne was a trusted source of guidance to rely upon.

Looking at Victoria's diary entries within the first few years of her reign there are hardly any that do not mention Lord Melbourne. Right after becoming queen most entries simply mention meetings with him, and continuous praise for his character, and her trust in him. They later escalate to describing social conversations: gossiping, and sharing stories of former monarchs, and their own pasts. It was said that the Queen was most alive when in his company, that he brought out a confidence in her that made her more lively in discussions.<sup>63</sup>

Melbourne very much took on a fatherly role with Victoria, advising her on obtaining vaccinations, exercising and eating better as well as being a constant supporter to her.<sup>64</sup> Victoria

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<sup>61</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:197.

<sup>62</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 139.

<sup>63</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 64.

<sup>64</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 2:104.

often described her daughterly feeling towards the man. In her journal she wrote she often finds “his advice just like a father, which are quite my feelings.”<sup>65</sup> Victoria clearly viewed their relationship in a familial manner. She recognized the way he treated her was with such kindness and gentleness was as if he was advising a daughter, which she aligned with her notions of their relationship. She also noted that during the coronation ceremony, Melbourne gave her “*such* a kind, and may I say *fatherly* look.”<sup>66</sup> With Melbourne she had a sense of protection. She deeply trusted the Prime Minister and believed he was her strongest ally, writing that “I feel *so safe* when he speaks to me and is with me.”<sup>67</sup> Some have thought this relationship was, at least on Victoria’s side, a romantic relationship. Analyzing Victoria’s own words makes it clear that while she greatly admired the man, she did not have feelings for him surpassing that of familial love and affection. This sense of love also encouraged a reliance on the man. In addition, unlike her other father-like figure Leopold, Melbourne was physically present often. She was able to see, converse with and depend on Melbourne each and every day. She was one of his priorities as the monarch, thus he was more than willing to set aside time for her, whereas Leopold was not able to as a king himself living on the continent. Such dedication is most evident in her responses to his absences.

As time went on the two grew very close and shared each other’s confidences. He told her stories of his family and schooling, and she shared her own childhood memories. Their communication became more and more frequent as she also depended on him for political advice and primarily desired to seek out his friendship often. Her diaries, as well as her collections of

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<sup>65</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:254.

<sup>66</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:358.

<sup>67</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:254.

letters, reflect this in the amount that Melbourne is mentioned. However, the true scale of their communication is not so easily documented as Victoria wrote in her diary that “I do not mention when I get communications from Lord Melbourne and when I write to him, for that occurs *every* day and *generally* 2 or 3 times a day.”<sup>68</sup> Thus the number of letters in their acquaintance, even just in the first few years of her reign is an overwhelming sum. It speaks quite well of the closeness of their relationship and her reliance on Lord Melbourne as she felt compelled to correspond with him multiple times every day. Victoria’s attachment combined with her trust in the man set her up to be extremely disappointed whenever she was without her dear Prime Minister. When Lord Melbourne was unable to attend a dinner as he had to meet with other politicians to discuss issues regarding trouble in Canada she wrote “I am *very* sorry to lose him even for *one* night.”<sup>69</sup> The idea that even being apart for an evening was difficult for the young queen demonstrates her dependency on the gentleman. This example does not represent her dependence on Melbourne in regards to her ruling the nation, but it reflects the power he had in their personal relationship.

The Queen was extremely distressed when learning that Melbourne’s party was losing the majority in the House of Commons, thus Melbourne would no longer be prime minister in 1839. She was brought to tears and begged Melbourne to still be her supporter, grasping his hands and proclaiming “you will not forsake me.”<sup>70</sup> This man was her guide in understanding political matters, writing her speeches and giving her the confidence to deliver them. Out of her

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<sup>68</sup> Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:236.

<sup>69</sup> Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:254.

<sup>70</sup> Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 2:160.

stubbornness and dependency on Melbourne's gentle guidance, Victoria made Sir Robert Peel's attempts at becoming the next Prime minister very difficult.

When Peel, the Conservative leader, came to Victoria to discuss his establishment as the next Prime Minister, he requested she change some of the appointments of her Ladies as they were wives of Whig supporters, suggested by Melbourne and none were supporters of Peel's political party. The role of the Ladies differed slightly by each individual's specific appointment, but the overall duties involved aiding the queen in dressing, and bathing and acting as companions to the queen. Already very upset by the loss of Lord Melbourne, Victoria adamantly refused to give up a single one of her Ladies, writing to Leopold that she "firmly resisted this attack upon my power."<sup>71</sup> This was understood as a display of clear political bias and was not taken well by Peel and others since the monarch traditionally was not supposed to show political favor. Victoria argued that it was within her right as queen to select her Ladies and that she did not discuss politics with them. Therefore they were in no position to influence her political favor or decisions and Peel had nothing to fear.<sup>72</sup> Melbourne was not thrilled with Victoria's stubbornness on the issue, and advised her against displaying too much favor in one political direction or making matters too personal, specifically stating "you shouldn't give way too much to personal dislikes."<sup>73</sup> Victoria disagreed and saw the issue as an attempt to undermine her reign and wrote to Melbourne that "The Queen felt this was an attempt to see whether she could be led and managed like a child."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 14 May 1839, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:220.

<sup>72</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 2:171.

<sup>73</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 2:205.

<sup>74</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 76.

In addition, Victoria claimed in a letter to Melbourne's government that this was an attempt of Peel's government to "treat me like a girl," thus in her refusal "I will show them that I am Queen of England."<sup>75</sup> Melbourne eventually supported her, as he always had. In the end, Peel stepped back and Lord Melbourne's party was once again in power.

This "Bedchamber Crisis" of 1839, as it is often referred to, reflects both Victoria's independence and dependence. Victoria was so desperate to retain her dearest advisor that she stubbornly refused Peel's requests and viewed him in a negative light from the beginning questioning "was Sir Robert so weak that *even* the Ladies must be of his opinion?"<sup>76</sup> The situation reflects her independence and stubbornness as a ruler, in that Lord Melbourne did not advise or request her to act in this way. He was sad to leave Victoria certainly, but he was willing to accept the change in government. Victoria decided to retain all her ladies, stand by her opinions and her preferred political party independently. Such actions were rewarded by great praise from the Whig party as they regained control of the government and praise from her Uncle Leopold who, as a monarch himself, was proud to see his niece stand up and exert her sovereign authority. Leopold wrote to her "*I approve very highly of the whole mode in which you proceed,*" and that "Peel in making his demand misjudged you" as he "dreamt of Court influence of people near the Sovereign."<sup>77</sup> This also exemplifies Leopold's encouragement of Victoria's independence. He approved of Victoria's decision as it was one she made on her own. It showed that she was not going to bend to the authority of those around her but instead stand her ground. Leopold's praised

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<sup>75</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 105.

<sup>76</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 2:172.

<sup>77</sup> Leopold the King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 17 May 1839, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:221.

his niece for surrounding herself with those she wants and trusts, and is not under the influence of politicians with alterative motives. This also illustrates Victoria's determination to not be controlled or manipulated politically, in this case by Peel. Victoria was sensitive and aware of attempts to undermine her authority and sought to squash such attempts at every turn. If she was going to be influenced or rely on another it was going to be on her terms.

Another example of Victoria's independence of Melbourne's influence is in regards to the military review at Windsor Garden Park in 1837. The military review was an official event in which the monarch, in reflection to their role as commander-in-chief of the English military, would greet and observe a number of the troops. Victoria, in part due to her interest in military affairs in memory of her father and in part due to her desire to appear to be a strong and capable monarch insisted that she ride on horseback when saluting greeting the First Regiment of Life Guards, Grenadier Guards and some Lancers.<sup>78</sup> Victoria hoped to imitate Queen Elizabeth I when she greeted her troops at Tilbury by doing so.<sup>79</sup> Lord Melbourne however was quite hesitant to see the Queen do so. Melbourne was most likely nervous for the Queen's safety and may not have thought her capable as a woman. However, Victoria was insistent and forced Melbourne to organize the event as she asked. Victoria wrote on the day how she "dressed, in a habit of dark blue with red collar and cuffs (the Windsor Uniform which all my gentlemen wear), a military cap, and my Order of the Garter."<sup>80</sup> Victoria was thrilled by the event. She felt powerful, regal and masculine, writing "I saluted them by putting my hand to my cap like the officers do, and was much admired for my

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<sup>78</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:227.

<sup>79</sup> Arnstein, "Warrior Queen," 4-5.

<sup>80</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:226.

manner of doing so,” and that “I felt for the first time like a man, as if I could fight myself at the head of my Troops.”<sup>81</sup> Victoria recognized that her reign challenged many of the gender norms existing during the time period, but felt that at the time her duty as a monarch overpowered her socialized duties as a woman. During Victoria’s lifetime it was expected for a woman to live in the sphere of the home, to be docile and submissive to men, and to be in a secondary position to them. Victoria, being the monarch and head of state blatantly challenged these gendered expectations. Being the commander-in-chief of the all male military further challenged these norms. Victoria recognized this step outside the gendered boundaries but felt pride in conducting the male role of reviewing her troops, in the male uniform while upon her noble horse. Victoria stated she even received praise and respect from those in attendance for her performance, illustrating how her role as a monarch often overruled the expectations of her gender. Victoria’s insistence in her performance also demonstrated her willingness to go against Melbourne when it regarded something she truly believed in and in cases that strengthened her image as queen.

While it is clear that Victoria was reliant on Melbourne, it was her choice to lean on him. Victoria did not face a lack of possible advisors when she came to the throne, but out of all of them she saw something in Lord Melbourne, deeming him the best person to attach herself to for a number of reasons. First, his manners and character traits were highly admirable to the Queen. She described Melbourne as an honest and kind hearted man on several occasions. The Queen herself was a very keen believer in the importance of honesty, which correlates to her appreciation of it in Melbourne’s character. In addition, Melbourne spoke to her in a very compelling manner. He was polite and treated her with the respect she sought as sovereign, but also advised her in a gentle, fatherly manner. In one interaction, Victoria shared stories of her childhood, expressing her

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<sup>81</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:227.



stubborn and naughty behavior, to which Melbourne responded that her honesty to her faults and her loyalty to the secrets she was told were signs of good character.<sup>82</sup> Melbourne tried to bring confidence to the young Queen, but also did not over flatter just to gain her approval. In addition, Victoria's uncle Leopold also approved of Melbourne's character, giving her more faith in relying on Melbourne. Leopold wrote that "his character is a guarantee which is valuable, and remember that *cleverness and talent without an honest heart and character, will never do for your minister.*"<sup>83</sup> However, Victoria believed that Melbourne had this honesty in him and thus with her uncle's advice, that she had long relied upon in her childhood and into her early moments of being queen, she felt confident in trusting Melbourne.

When assessing her other options for advisors, it made sense that she sought out Melbourne. In regards to Leopold, he was a reliable advisor but the distance was inconvenient in winning Victoria's confidence. In addition, Leopold was a reminder of her childhood. It is clear in Victoria's remembrance of her years before the crown that she held them with a certain degree of resentment. She once stated later in life that she was not truly happy until she turned eighteen.<sup>84</sup> It can be suggested that Victoria wanted to distance herself from that era of her life and in pursuit of her independence as a ruler she looked towards new advisors such as Melbourne. This logic then also eliminates her previous less prevalent advisors such as Baron Stockmar, courtier who worked closely with Leopold and Albert, as options. Lehzen too could not serve as her main political advisor as she did not have the political experience to win Victoria's ear in that center of her life.

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<sup>82</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:280.

<sup>83</sup> Leopold the King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 30 June 1837, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:105.

<sup>84</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 57.

The governess, however, was a major source of comfort and support to the Queen even into her marriage.

Another possible advisor was Lord John Russell, a Whig party leader, who Victoria recalled communicating with as much as she did with Lord Melbourne in her early years as queen.<sup>85</sup> However, Russell did not have the same charm, and welcoming and supportive nature as Melbourne that the Queen deeply admired. Therefore, Melbourne was the natural choice. Victoria was as prepared as she could be when she came to the throne. She had a solid foundation needed to be a strong and honorable queen but certainly still need guidance in navigating life in this new role. Historians argue the Victoria's reliance on Melbourne was the best move for the country citing that even Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington, both in political opposition to Melbourne, felt that he was the best one to teach her "kingcraft."<sup>86</sup>

This companionship and reliance had an expiration date too. As the Queen was going through her years on the throne the idea of marriage was discussed on numerous occasions. Victoria admitted to not seeing herself getting married for some time, but also recognized the loneliness that went along with the crown.<sup>87</sup> After the "Bedchamber Crisis" she was also coming to the realization that Melbourne's position was not a permanent one, and that someday she would be left without this man she greatly relied on. In response, Victoria was more open to finding a permanent confidant, advisor and friend in a husband.

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<sup>85</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 1:201.

<sup>86</sup> Viscount Esher, ed. *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 34.

<sup>87</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 2:193.



### **Prince Albert: The Man Behind the Crown**

Victoria continued to communicate frequently with her Uncle Leopold until his death in 1865, and Lord Melbourne until his party lost power in 1841. However, both men's influence over Victoria greatly shrank as a new man, Prince Albert, entered her life and they married on February 10, 1840. For Victoria, Albert was an angel among men, she worshiped and loved him intensely. Albert himself was a very intelligent and moral man. He had many hopes and ideas for England, but he was also cautious to follow the constitution to avoid claims that he was actually the one in control. Due to the combination of Victoria's devotion to Albert and the difficult and close pregnancies Victoria experienced, Albert eventually gained significant political control, as well as influence over Victoria and her Royal position. This was a gradual and, at times, difficult transition, but not necessarily motivated by desire for power. Instead it was due to Albert's belief that he was a better fit for the position of monarch since Victoria belonged to what he considered the weaker sex, and thus needed his assistance to handle the responsibilities. This reliance was the strongest Victoria had at any point in her life. Victoria did grow to be dependent upon Albert, but it was not a completely willing transition and one she broke free of once he died.

Albert was the Prince of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha born in 1819. He was the second son to the German Duke Ernest and his wife Princess Louise of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg.<sup>88</sup> He and Victoria were first cousins, as his father and her mother were siblings. From a very young age it was suggested that Albert was encouraged to make a union with Victoria.<sup>89</sup> Albert spent the majority of his childhood in Germany and was a very bright student, studying German literature and philosophy, as well as music and various outdoor activities when he was a child. Into his teens Albert studied at the University of Bonn to study law, politics, metaphysics and economics among much more.<sup>90</sup> He had a passion for learning as well as a living a moral life. At age eleven Albert is said to have announced to his father that he intended to be “a good and useful man.”<sup>91</sup> A major point in Albert’s moral code was his disgust for infidelity. It was infidelity that resulted in his own parents’ separation and the distressing banishment of his mother in 1824 when Albert was a child. He never saw his mother again after she was sent away. Albert shared the pain Victoria felt of missing a parent and together they sought to create a home of their dreams.<sup>92</sup> The combination of these characteristics only made Albert a more appealing candidate for the consort to the Queen. As such, King Leopold sent Stockmar to travel with Albert on his tour of Italy from 1838 to 1839.

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<sup>88</sup> Stanley Weintraub, 2012 "Albert [Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha] (1819–1861), prince consort, consort of Queen Victoria," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14 Apr. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-274>.

<sup>89</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 83.

<sup>90</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 86.

<sup>91</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 84.

<sup>92</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 126-127. Weintraub, “Albert [Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha].”

During this time Albert developed a trust and admiration for Stockmar, and Stockmar was able to report to Leopold that Albert was indeed a suitable candidate.<sup>93</sup> He was not overly social and did not have many political aspirations; however, Albert had an admirable character so the match continued to be encouraged.

During the engagement period and initially in the marriage, Victoria was hoping to maintain a separation between her private life and her position. Victoria enjoyed the freedom of her position and did not want to see it diminished, but at the same time, she deeply loved Albert. She sought his company and comfort in her life, but not his advice and authority. Before they were even married Victoria sought to make her stance of independence known by refusing to grant Albert a title of peerage and by selecting Albert's household for him. Granting Albert a title of peerage was against the government's desire, as they feared the influence of a foreign prince in their government.<sup>94</sup> Victoria agreed to the matter out of respect for her government. It also coincided with her desire to keep Albert out of politics. However, Victoria also wanted Albert to be recognized for his position as the spouse of the sovereign and outrank all others but her.<sup>95</sup> This demonstrates Victoria's high regard for Albert as a superior individual, and how much she worshiped him. At the same time though Victoria sought to maintain her own political power separate from their relationship. Albert came to see not much wrong with being denied a title of peerage as such a title would be lower hierarchically than the title of prince that he was born with.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 86-87.

<sup>94</sup> Queen Victoria to the Prince Albert, 27 November 1839, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:252.

<sup>95</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 27 November 1839, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:251.

<sup>96</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 196-197.

The issue regarding his household did upset him though. During their engagement Victoria wrote to Albert of the individuals who would make up his household Gentlemen. Out of comfort, familiarity, and wanting to be surrounded by his allies Albert was hoping to appoint a people from his acquaintance to the positions but Victoria denied him. Albert pleaded with his fiancé in a letter arguing “except for yourself I have no one to confide in” and that “I am leaving my home with all its associations, all my bosom friends, and going to a country in which everything is new and strange to me.”<sup>97</sup> She did not ask his opinions on the matter but decided it for him, showing her power and dominance. She even went so far as to tell him, “I fear that you do not like but it is necessary, my dearest most excellent Albert...I only do as it is for your own good.”<sup>98</sup> This illustrates Victoria’s desire to remain in control of her reign and maintain the independence she valued as a single female monarch.

Once married, Victoria more strictly separated Albert and the crown. Mr. Anson, the Prince’s Private Secretary, wrote in a memorandum of the conversation between Lord Melbourne and Baron Stockmar remarking that the Queen was not discussing political matters with the Prince. To Melbourne’s understanding it was because the Queen feared a “difference of opinion and she thinks that domestic harmony is more likely to follow from avoiding subjects likely to cause difference.”<sup>99</sup> Victoria was adamant about not being under Albert’s influence and went against his advice when provided. This was demonstrated when Victoria received important papers from the ministers with the instructions to sign immediately. Albert advised that the Queen put them off for

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<sup>97</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 117.

<sup>98</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 118.

<sup>99</sup> Mr. Anson, “Memorandum: Minutes of Conversations with Lord Melbourne and Baron Stockmar,” 18 May 1840, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:283.

a few days to demonstrate that she would not be ordered about. In response, Victoria immediately signed the papers against Albert's advice, affirming that she would not be controlled by him in political matters.<sup>100</sup>

In these first few months of their marriage the closest the Prince got to the dispatch boxes and Victoria's job was to aid her in blotting papers she signed.<sup>101</sup> For Albert, this was not enough as he felt useless and bored. He wrote to one friend, "In my home life I am happy and contented; but the difficulty in filling my place with the proper dignity is, that I am only the husband, and not the master in the house."<sup>102</sup> At the time it was the social norm for the husband to be the head of the family, the household and all matters. It was expected that the husband was superior to the wife and it was the Husband who should be working not the wife. As a result, Albert's situation made him very frustrated and he craved to take on more responsibility. Albert was a well educated individual and was often guided by Stockmar and Leopold for this very position as Victoria's husband, confidant and political advisor.<sup>103</sup> However, his training and skills were not being put to use. With time and changing circumstances, his role changed and slowly turned into Albert being at the helm of politics, yet there were other obstacles in his way before he could reach this state.

Before Albert could obtain full influence over Victoria, she had to shed her former advisor Lord Melbourne completely. Luckily in 1841, only two years after Victoria and Albert's

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<sup>100</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 127.

<sup>101</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 144.

<sup>102</sup> Prince Albert to Prince William zu Löwenstein-Wertheim-Freudenberg, May 1840, in *Letters of the Prince Consort 1831-1861*, eds. Dr. Kurt Jagow, (New York: His Majesty the King and E.P.Dutton & Company, Inc., 1938), 69.

<sup>103</sup> Jagow, ed. "1831-1840 Youth: Education," in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 7.



marriage, Lord Melbourne and his party fell out of power. Naturally, Victoria was very upset at the loss of her dear friend, and was once again resentful of Sir Robert Peel for taking Melbourne's position. Albert greatly disapproved of this behavior, as he strongly believed that the crown should be above politics and be strictly nonpartisan.<sup>104</sup> Following his retirement from politics, Melbourne and Victoria continued their friendship through letters and visits, but these were far less common as Victoria was busy running the country, raising her children and had the companionship of her beloved Albert. Melbourne's influence greatly diminished, although the Queen still looked to him for political advice. Before leaving her, Melbourne encouraged Victoria to rely on the Prince. He specifically told her "the prince understands everything so well, and has a clever able head" and that he holds "the highest opinion of HRH's judgment, temper and discretion."<sup>105</sup> This seal of approval from Lord Melbourne certainly stirred Victoria's confidence in Albert as a political ally and advisor. In addition, at the time of Melbourne's retirement Victoria was heavily pregnant with her second child Prince Albert Edward (Bertie) who would be born that November while also caring for her daughter Princess Victoria (Vicky) who was born in November of 1840. This advice and the pressure of two young children encouraged Victoria to share more of her career with the Prince. She recognized his unhappiness in being left out and also sought to have another person in her corner where Melbourne once was.

Prince Albert felt that the person who was his biggest threat to influencing Victoria was her former governess, Baroness Lehzen. It is understood that the Baroness was not the biggest fan of Albert or his marriage to her dear Victoria. Lehzen believed that her ward would become the

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<sup>104</sup> Jagow, ed. "1840-1847 The Years of Testing: Increasing Influence," in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 66.

<sup>105</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 135.

next Queen Elizabeth, being strong and independent.<sup>106</sup> She saw Albert as a threat not only to her own influence over the Queen, but also a threat to Victoria's political independence. Anson recorded that Lehzen was "pointing and exaggerating every little fault of the Prince, constantly misrepresenting him, constantly trying to undermine him in the Queen's affections and making herself appear a martyr...for the Queen's sake."<sup>107</sup> In return, Albert saw Lehzen as a threat for the Queen's affections and ear, as well as, an intruder in their familial lives. One reason for this is that the Baroness spoke German, the language used between the couple for private conversations. The Baroness also continued her role of mothering Victoria, looking over her private accounts, running the household, and accompanying her when she was dressing.<sup>108</sup> Albert believed, as the male and husband of the Queen, that much of these tasks were supposed to his, especially running the household. Albert grew extremely frustrated with Lehzen and jealous of her relationship with Victoria. He wrote, "Lehzen, in her madness, has made Victoria believe that whatever good qualities she possesses are due to her. I, on the other hand, regard Victoria as naturally a fine character."<sup>109</sup> Albert believed that Victoria's faults were caused by Lehzen, and that Lehzen was crucial in influencing Victoria's self image and her opinions of the people around her. In addition, he wrote to Stockmar that "all the disagreeableness I suffer comes from one and the same person, and that is precisely the person whom Victoria chooses for her friend and confidant."<sup>110</sup> For some

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<sup>106</sup> Gillian Gill, *We Two: Victoria and Albert: Rulers, Partners, Rivals*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010), 52.

<sup>107</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 219.

<sup>108</sup> Gill, *We Two*, 178-179.

<sup>109</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 229.

<sup>110</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 229.

time, the Prince sought to remove Lehzen, but it was not in his authority and it was against Victoria's wishes.

With time however, Lehzen's misjudgment and authority brought harm to the family and gave Victoria reason to agree with her husband and dismiss Lehzen in September of 1842. In a letter to Stockmar, Albert wrote "the welfare of my children and Victoria's existence as sovereign are too sacred for me not to die fighting rather than yield them as prey to Lehzen."<sup>111</sup> This stance came to action with issues surrounding the royal nursery. Being in charge of the household, upon Victoria's request much to Albert's dismay, Lehzen was also given the responsibility of establishing the nursery in 1840. Soon after the birth of the couple's second child their eldest, Vicky, became seriously ill. Sir James Clark was the appointed doctor to the young girl, and administered a toxic substance, calomel, to the young girl. This was the same doctor who was assigned to examine Lady Flora years earlier in 1839 and did not recognize how far along her illness was but instead deemed her to be with child.<sup>112</sup> Lady Flora Hastings was the Duchess of Kent's Lady of the Bedchamber and a supporter of the Duchess and Conroy's efforts to control Victoria, thus earning Victoria's distrust. Early into Victoria's reign in 1839, Lady Flora fell ill and it was thought that she was scandalously carrying a child as was confirmed by Dr. Clark. In actuality, Flora was suffering from a tumor.<sup>113</sup> This affair created a great deal of tension in the

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<sup>111</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 229.

<sup>112</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 152.

<sup>113</sup> K. D. Reynolds, 2004 "Hastings, Lady Flora Elizabeth (1806–1839), courtier," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14 Apr. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12565>.

court and created a negative view of Victoria as she too fed into the rumors of Flora's supposed pregnancy. For this reason, among others, Albert did not trust the doctor.

The couple ended up quarrelling and placing blame on each other for their daughter's dangerously weakened state. During this fight, both the Queen and the Prince wrote to Stockmar for advice and for him to communicate to the other. In his anger, Albert wrote to Victoria that her decisions and allowances in the nursery will cause their daughter's death.<sup>114</sup> This greatly upset the Queen and in hopes of ending their feud and ensuring Albert's happiness, Victoria became willing to remove Lehzen from her household. The Prince got his wish. Now there was no one to compete with for the Queen's attention. Throughout all of this the Queen was falling more and more in love with Albert there was no one above him in her heart.

After the loss of these two advisors in Victoria's life, Albert became the dominant force and could gain entrance into England's political sphere. This entrance initially began around the time of Victoria's first pregnancy and was strengthened by each of the eight pregnancies after that. While Victoria was pregnant with Princess Victoria, she experienced an attack on her life.<sup>115</sup> This greatly frightened Parliament as they began to question what would happen to their nation should the Queen pass away in childbirth like Princess Charlotte or if the Queen were to be killed by another attacker while the child was young. Who would act as regent? Out of Victoria's deep love, trust and dedication to Albert she insisted that he be named the regent should anything come to pass. Parliament was hesitant at having a foreigner in such a powerful position but conceded, much to Albert's delight.<sup>116</sup> This act significantly elevated Albert's status and position amongst the

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<sup>114</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 152.

<sup>115</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 212.

<sup>116</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 215-216.

ministers. There was now a possibility that Albert could one day be their acting sovereign for some time if things turned out poorly for the Queen, therefore they had to keep him on their good side.

Children continued to be a blessing for Albert's political career as childbirth weakened the Queen significantly, much to her dismay. Victoria was very upset to be pregnant only a few months into her marriage writing that "I have always hated the idea and I prayed to God night and day to be left free for at least six months...I cannot understand how anyone can wish for such a thing, especially at the beginning of a marriage."<sup>117</sup> During the time of her confinement, Victoria was forced to hand over her political reins to her husband due to her weakened state. During this time the Prince was to receive and send all messages from the cabinet. Upon giving birth, Victoria faced many emotional and physical hardships post partum. She was also impressed by Albert's work, so she continued to rely on him for political support. Anson noted that after this the Prince was given keys to the boxes by the Queen and became "in fact, tho' not in name, Her Majesty's Private Secretary."<sup>118</sup> In this position Albert thrived.

During the pregnancy for the couple's second child only a year later, the Prince further demonstrated his political control. Albert saw signs of a second Bedchamber Crisis brewing and believed if it were to come to fruition it would deeply harm the throne. Without Victoria's direct knowledge and in response to the threat, Albert took control of organizing the Queen's Ladies to what he deemed more appropriate and appealing to the political situation.<sup>119</sup> Victoria's political independence was diminished, but she was grateful to Albert for overcoming that hardship for

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<sup>117</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 130.

<sup>118</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 218.

<sup>119</sup> Gill, *We Two*, 170.

her. While she was very willing to grant Albert more political power, Victoria was not yet ready to fully grant him influence. When Leopold wrote to Victoria hoping for her to have many more children in the future, the disgruntled queen responded that “with me the great inconvenience a large family would be to us all, and particularly to the country.”<sup>120</sup> Victoria recognized the effects the physical and emotional strain childbearing had upon her ability to rule and did not view it positively. While she trusted Albert and was deeply devoted to him, she did not want to lose the freedom she felt as a new queen and a new bride, where she solely held the reins of power. It was her duty to rule, not his. However, the continual pregnancies for nine children made this difficult for the Queen to accomplish. With time and each pregnancy, the Queen was feeling physically and politically weaker. This weakness only grew as her self doubts expanded, encouraged to some extent by Albert. All the while Albert’s own authority and influence over the court expanded.

Despite Victoria’s desire to have a small family, she found herself pregnant more often than not while married to Albert. The couple brought their first child to the world exactly nine months after their marriage in November of 1840. Within a few months after the birth of Vicky, the Queen was pregnant with their second child and the future King Edward VII who was born November of 1841 was named Albert (Bertie). The following August, Victoria was once again with child and gave birth to her second daughter Princess Alice in April of 1843. This child was closely followed by Prince Alfred (Affie) in August of 1844. After, came Princess Helena in May of 1846, Princess Louise in March of 1848, and Prince Arthur in May 1850. Prince Leopold, who was a frail child due to having hemophilia, and left Victoria in a state of grief and constant concern, was born in April of 1853. The final child of the couple, Princess Beatrice was born a few years after Leopold in April of 1857. Victoria became very dependent on Beatrice’s innocent company

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<sup>120</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 133.

as Albert died almost four years later and left her in a very melancholy state. These constant and continual pregnancies were exhausting and made the Queen feel like an animal more than a respected monarch. In 1858 Victoria wrote to her eldest daughter who was married at the time that “what you say of the pride of giving life to an immortal souls is very fine, dear, but I own I cannot enter into that; I think much more of our being like a cow or a dog at such moments.”<sup>121</sup> She certainly loved each and every one of her children but felt that children looked more like frogs when they were first born and she had little interest in them until they grew a bit older. Victoria wrote again to her daughter, the Princess Royal, on children stating that “I have no tender for them till they have become a little more human...in short as long as they have their big body and little limbs and that terrible frog-like action.”<sup>122</sup> This may have contributed or been a result of the post partum depression the Queen often faced between most of her children and the misery she felt while being pregnant. Victoria explained that while and after she was pregnant she felt as if she was “pinned down- one’s wings clipped- in fact at the best only half oneself.”<sup>123</sup> In addition she wrote to her uncle Leopold that after the birth of Bertie her emotions and nerves “were so battered” and that “I suffered a *whole year* from it” thus illustrating how distraught she often was after giving birth.<sup>124</sup> Even while there was a bit more of a gap for recovery time between the Queen’s last two children, Victoria faced a great deal of concern for her son Arthur who was diagnosed with hemophilia and was very careful about his condition. Luckily the recovery after Beatrice’s birth

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<sup>121</sup> Queen Victoria to Victoria the Princess Royal, 15 June 1858, in *Dearest Child: Letters between Queen Victoria and the Princess Royal (1858-1861)*, ed. Roger Fulford, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 115.

<sup>122</sup> Queen Victoria to Victoria the Princess Royal, May 2 1859, in *Dearest Child*, 191.

<sup>123</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 159.

<sup>124</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 188.

was quite quick and Victoria did not seem to face the same difficult emotional state after. Unfortunately, the Queen had only a few years to welcome her fully healthy state before the death of both her mother and beloved Albert in 1861. Clearly having these difficult pregnancies so close together made it very difficult for Victoria to rule independently and efficiently, so her reliance on Albert grew very heavy.

With time, Albert began to accept more and more prominent roles in the government. He was making speeches against slavery, giving advice on a number of political issues as well as on the education system particularly at Cambridge University, opening museums and memorials, in addition to taking part in international politics.<sup>125</sup> During this time, Victoria was still active in political matters, but certainly took more of a back seat, stating that “really when one is so happy, blessed in one’s home life, as I am politics (provided my country is safe) must take only second place.”<sup>126</sup> In the care of Prince Albert, her nation was most certainly safe, granting Victoria the ability to enjoy the domestic bliss her family provided for her and settle into the gendered expectations of a wife and mother. Victoria welcomed her domestic role, thanks to Albert. The Prince believed that it was natural for Victoria to reduce her independence in ruling once married, as being a woman prevented her from fully handling the position of the monarch. He wrote to the Duke of Wellington that “a female sovereign has many disadvantages in comparison to a king” but if said monarch is married to man who understands that his position is not to publicly overshadow her, she “will be found to be stronger than that of a male.”<sup>127</sup> He continues in writing

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<sup>125</sup> Jagow, ed. “1840-1847 The Years of Testing: Increasing Influence,” in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 67.

<sup>126</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 137.

<sup>127</sup> Prince Albert to the Duke of Wellington, 6 April 1850, in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 156.



that it is the responsibility of the Prince Consort to “fill up every gap, which as a woman, she would naturally leave in the exercise of her regal functions.”<sup>128</sup> Albert believed that Victoria was unable to effectively rule without him by her side; that without his advice, influence and activism she would be a weak sovereign compared to her male counterparts and the nation would suffer for it. In Albert’s mind, he was the savior, filling in the gaps that Victoria was leaving behind as a female ruler. However, he would not dare state it so directly and certainly not to the public, as the nation would be outraged if they learned that they were being led by a German outsider as opposed to their dear motherly queen. No matter how much Albert put into his work, how much good he did for the country, and the titles he received, he was always seen as an outsider, never to be fully trusted by the general public.

The idea that, as a man, Albert was naturally superior was one that had deeply impacted Victoria. Early in her reign the Queen idolized Queen Elizabeth for her independence, yet once married to Albert she became extremely dependent on him.<sup>129</sup> To Victoria, Albert could do no wrong, ensuring his happiness was her biggest concern. She worshiped the man, and he did love her as well but neither saw the other as an equal. To Victoria, Albert was a hero, and a perfect angel. To Albert, Victoria was a loving and caring woman, but he needed to protect her from her own emotions, mental instability and natural gendered weakness. In addition, he felt that he was to be her superior, being a more educated male. He wrote that he was “the natural head of her family, superintendent of her household, manager of her private affairs, sole *confidential* adviser in politics and only assistant in her communications with the officers of the government.”<sup>130</sup> He

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<sup>128</sup> Prince Albert to the Duke of Wellington, 6 April 1850, in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 157.

<sup>129</sup> Queen Victoria, *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, 2:127, 2:158 and 2:216

<sup>130</sup> Prince Albert to the Duke of Wellington, 6 April 1850, in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 157.

took over every aspect of her life, and she gladly let him out of her faith, love and belief in her own inability that was encouraged by Albert's sexist ideas. By not seeing each other as equals, Victoria's struggle to rule independently was perpetuated. If Albert had no qualms writing his beliefs of Victoria's gendered inabilities to the Duke it can be assumed that he practiced them and mentioned them in the comfort of his home and to Victoria as her advisor. Out of her trust and love for Albert she came to submit to these ideas and believed his understanding of her female inabilities. He also subtly made her seem inferior by often addressing her in letters as "Poor child" or "Little one."<sup>131</sup> These phrases are certainly terms of endearment, but they have an underlying connotation of viewing Victoria as naïve, innocent and in need of protection and direction like a child. In return, Victoria would often address her husband as "Dearest" and displaying her affection and dedication to him.<sup>132</sup>

Victoria was certainly a woman of contradictions, most likely due to the tensions that existed between her roles. Out of her love for Albert, Victoria wanted to be the best wife possible to him. At the same time though, out of her love and devotion to her people she wanted to be the best monarch possible. According to the social standards of the era, to be the ideal wife was to allow the husband to be the head of the household, and for the woman's sphere and role to remain at home raising the children and keeping the household together. But the role of monarch, a predominantly male role, called for dominance, strength, and to be active in the public sphere dealing with politics, economics, and military affairs. To succeed at both, according to societal standards, posed a clear challenge and tension for Victoria. Victoria is known to have been opposed

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<sup>131</sup> Prince Albert to Queen Victoria, 28 March 1844, in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 91; Prince Albert to Queen Victoria, 28 March 1844, in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 91.

<sup>132</sup> Queen Victoria to the Prince Albert, 10 February 1840, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:273.

to the women's rights movement that was gaining momentum during her reign, despite the fact that she treasured her role as a monarch, a typically male position and the freedoms it allowed her. Victoria wrote in a letter to the prime minister, William Gladstone in 1883 that "the Queen is a woman herself- & knows what an anomaly her own position is: -but that can have reconciled with reason & propriety tho' it is a terribly difficult & trying one. But to tear away all the barriers wh [sic] surround a woman...wld [sic] be to introduce a total disregard of what must be considered as belonging to the rules & principles of morality."<sup>133</sup> This illustrates Victoria's view after her marriage, that her own reign is an abnormal exception but that women are not to step out of the roles given to them by society. Previous to her marriage Victoria felt free and excited to cross these social norms like in the case of greeting her troops in the male uniform and on horseback. Another example of this contradictory understanding of female gender roles is in how Victoria wrote in 1852, while still married and just two years after Albert's letter to the Duke of Wellington, that "we women are not *made* for governing- and if we are good women we must *dislike* these masculine occupations; but there are times which force one to take interest in them... and *I* do, of course *intensely*."<sup>134</sup> This statement reflects the ideas Albert mentioned to the Duke that women are not meant to rule, which suggests that Albert imparted and discusses these sexist ideas of women and power with his wife. What strengthens this idea, is that previous to their marriage, Victoria does not express such sentiments but instead explicitly expresses her enjoyment of feeling like a man as previously mentioned in the case of reviewing her troops, as well as, expressing her

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<sup>133</sup> Gail Turley Houston, *Reading and Writing Victoria: the conduct book and the legal constitution of female sovereignty*, in *Remaking Queen Victoria*, ed. Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 175.

<sup>134</sup> Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1876*, Women in Culture and Society Series (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 32.

joy in meeting with her ministers and doing the work a sovereign must. Victoria wrote to her Uncle Leopold within the first weeks of her reign that “it is to me the greatest pleasure to do my duty for my country and my people, no fatigue, however great, will be burdensome to me if it is for the welfare of the nation.”<sup>135</sup> This is evidence that the Queen genuinely enjoyed the work she had as queen, that this was more than just an interest out of duty but a love for being active, challenged, and expanding beyond the social norms expected of her. With her marriage though, these emotions shift and we see that the queen expresses ideas of female subservience more not previously expressed.

Historian Margaret Homans argues that the contradictory nature of Victoria’s reign once she seems to express approval for the ideas of an obedient Victorian wife and mother “paradoxically, is the source of her authority as Queen.”<sup>136</sup> The author argues that in behaving this way, Victoria gains public support and trust by not rocking the boat too much which in turn grants her more power over the public and government by not being a source of trouble. It is an interesting theory, in which Victoria is working the social system in her favor.

Not only was Albert “the husband of the Queen, the tutor of the royal children, the private secretary of the sovereign,” but also “her permanent minister.”<sup>137</sup> Albert took on each of these positions with pride, an iron work ethic and deep sense of responsibility. This caused him to take faults and failures personally bringing him to exhaustion on multiple occasions. This way of life, combined with a weak health brought Albert to an early demise at age forty-two in 1861, ending

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<sup>135</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 25 June 1837, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 1:103.

<sup>136</sup> Homans, *Royal Representations*, 33.

<sup>137</sup> Prince Albert to the Duke of Wellington, 6 April 1850, in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 157.

his career as Victoria's permanent minister and support system.<sup>138</sup> The Queen was now left with all of the responsibilities once more on her shoulders, but without Albert or Lord Melbourne to help guide her and carry the weight. This was her moment to either sink or swim.

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<sup>138</sup> Jagow, ed. "1856-1861 The Final Years: Low Spirits," in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 255-256.

### **Widowhood: Alone and Independent**

Victoria's devotion to Albert was unchallenged and ran unimaginably deep. When he passed away at the young age of forty-two in 1861, the Queen was absolutely crushed. Gone was her angel, her companion, confidant and political advisor. Victoria never imagined that she would be left without her husband, nor her children without a father, so early in their lives. For the majority of their twenty-one years of marriage Albert played a significant role in Victoria's position of monarch. He drafted letters, organized aspects of the household, conducted meetings with ministers, both with and without Victoria, and created plans for the country and his children's lives. Now that he was gone, the Queen was alone to make decisions like the early days of her reign, but this time without a mentor like Melbourne to help guide her. Immediately after Albert's death the Queen entered into a deep and long lasting state of mourning, significantly reducing the amount of time she spent on her royal duties. Over the years of their marriage, Victoria grew accustomed to taking Albert's lead and having him handle most of the political needs of the country. Without him Victoria began doubting her own abilities, but would be forced to step up due to rising international political conflicts. Overcoming these challenges strengthened Victoria's own self confidence and blossomed her independence. The Queen became a force to be reckoned with, stubbornly questioning politicians, impressing foreign dignitaries and finding the willpower to run the country for another forty years until her own death in 1901. In these years the main person Victoria relied on in all political matters was herself, being the most independent she ever had been throughout her reign

Prince Albert passed away on December 14, 1861 just two months before their twenty-second wedding anniversary. The Prince had become very ill within the weeks leading up to his death. During this time, he told his wife “I do not cling to life. You do: but I set no store by it. I have no tenacity of life.”<sup>139</sup> Throughout his marriage to the Queen, Albert was a hard and dedicated worker. He spent an endless amounts of time on political matters, believing that idleness was one of the worst vices a person could possess. In April of 1861 Albert confided in Stockmar that “I am well-nigh overwhelmed by business, as I do my utmost to save Victoria all trouble.”<sup>140</sup> Albert pushed himself to the edges of his abilities for his wife, children and the country. Even during his illness and just days before he passed, Albert was drafting letters to the Prime Minister in the Queen’s name regarding dealings with America that ultimately contributed to the reduction of tensions between the nations and the settlement of the dispute.<sup>141</sup> This letter was in response to the Trent Affair in which the Union military captured two Confederate diplomats off of a British ship during the American Civil War. The act was evidently illegal and if not smoothed over could have resulted in the start of a war between the US and the UK.

When he died, the Queen was utterly lost. The man that she relied upon for almost everything, the man she loved like no other person in her life, who was the most excellent companion and father to their still growing children was gone. Victoria wrote to her Uncle Leopold that “my life as a happy one is ended! The world is gone for me!”<sup>142</sup> Previous to Albert’s passing

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<sup>139</sup> Woodham-Smith, *Queen Victoria: Her Birth to Death of Prince Consort*, 417.

<sup>140</sup> Prince Albert to Baron von Stockmar, 18 March 1861, in *The letters of the Prince Consort*, 360.

<sup>141</sup> Prince Albert (under the name of Queen Victoria) to Lord John Russell, 1 December 1861, in *The Letters of the Prince Consort*, 372-373.

<sup>142</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 20 October 1861, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 3:602.

Victoria's mother had passed as well and only afterwards Victoria learned just how much her mother actually cared for her despite their strained relationship and her contribution to Victoria's complex upbringing when going through the diaries and treasures her mother left behind. Victoria wrote to her uncle Leopold "her love for *me*- it is *too* toughing! I have found little books with the accounts of my babyhood, and they show *such* unbounded tenderness!" and that "I am so wretched to think *how, for a time, two people most* wickedly estranged us!"<sup>143</sup> Here, Victoria comes to blame both Conroy and Lady Flora for the difficult relationship between Victoria and her mother as opposed to blaming her mother for the resentment she felt towards her childhood. The mourning of her mother and the relationship they could have had left the Queen in a vulnerable position resulting in her further dependence on Albert to handle the Duchess' will, and Victoria's political responsibilities during her time of mourning and sensitive mental state.<sup>144</sup> Losing her beloved husband soon after only increased Victoria's distress.

In response to Albert's death, Victoria entered a deep state of grief. Members of court and the household servants were to join the Queen in her mourning, and wore black for the next eight years. Princess Alice, their third child, too was obligated to wear black to her wedding in 1862. For the rest of the Queen's life she used writing paper with heavy black edges to reflect her mourning. Immediately after Albert's death Victoria had the room photographed, and ordered a fresh pair of night and day clothes be laid out in the Prince's room each day with a bowl of warm water as well.<sup>145</sup> The royal children were also instructed by their mother to take a photograph in

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<sup>143</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 9 April 1861, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria* 3:560.

<sup>144</sup> Prince Albert to Baron von Stockmar, 5 April 1861, in *The Letters of the Prince Consort*, 360.

<sup>145</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 286.



front of their father's bust in memory of him. For quite some time the Queen slept with Albert's night robe as a comfort to herself. Victoria became very depressed at the loss of her angel, writing to her eldest daughter, Princess Victoria the Crown Princess of Prussia at the time, "truly the Prince was my entire self, my very life and soul... I only lived through him My heavenly Angel!"<sup>146</sup> She hoped and believed that she would soon follow Albert into the next life as well, but instead she was to live on and rule the nation for another forty years.

Overwhelmed by the grief, Victoria sheltered herself from society and the public eye for some time. It was evident that throughout her reign Victoria experienced strong, and at times overwhelming, emotional fits according to her husband who claimed she was far too passionate to deal with most time.<sup>147</sup> Albert once wrote to Lord Clarendon that he felt it was his duty to care for and monitor Victoria's mental health like "a cat watches a mousehole."<sup>148</sup> Knowing the background of her family, and the rumored madness past monarchs like George III had faced, Victoria was very conscious of her emotional outbursts. She often believed that only Albert could soothe them. He knew how to handle her emotions and served to take care of her emotional and mental state by taking on much of the stressors in her life, as he was also the one to insist and imply that they were in existence. The Queen did experience frayed nerves and depression after her pregnancies. Combining that feeling of being emotionally out of control with the implications from her trusted husband that she was overly emotional and hereditarily prone to mental illness, it was natural for the Queen to feel anxious about her emotions especially experiencing them without her husband present to tell her when it was alright or not. Now without him, Victoria's fears only

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<sup>146</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 290.

<sup>147</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 161.

<sup>148</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 170.

strengthened. As a result, she secluded herself to protect herself from madness while she worked through her grief.<sup>149</sup> She decided that she was unable to meet her ministers in person and had them address her through her daughter Alice or General Grey, who was her Private Secretary as well as Albert's. Victoria was also insistent on refusing to open parliament for some time.<sup>150</sup> The public understood and felt for their poor, grieving queen but they only had so much patience. Many believed three years were more than enough time for the monarch to recover, yet Victoria disagreed and continued to seclude herself from nearly all public appearances. This is not to say that the Queen was not doing her duty to the country. While she would avoid the public there was no avoiding her other obligations. It was noted by Sir Theodore Martin, the writer in charge of developing a biography on Albert, that the Queen worked tirelessly on her dispatch boxes. Martin wrote that "from 7:30 a.m. when she gets up, to twelve at night or 12:30, she is continually at work, except the hours of meals & exercise, and half an hour after dinner."<sup>151</sup> The Queen kept up this work ethic each day, answering the dispatch boxes that came twice a day. This illustrates Victoria's dedication to her most important responsibilities and willingness to put them completely on her own shoulders once again. However, the public and government still demanded more from her.

It was not until 1866 that Victoria begrudgingly agreed to open parliament. The major reason she did so was not in response to the demands and urgings of the government and people, but instead in service of her children. Her son Arthur was coming of age soon and the Queen wanted to ensure he and the rest of her children would receive the expected allowance payments from the government. Many felt that the government's funds should not be granted to an inactive

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<sup>149</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 312.

<sup>150</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 347.

<sup>151</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 308.

queen and her family.<sup>152</sup> Victoria was extremely anxious upon this event. Even when Albert was alive the Queen was known to dislike opening Parliament, as it made her feel intimidated and nervous. She complained to those around her that it was a terrible experience to find herself “ALONE in state.”<sup>153</sup> The use and emphasis of the word “alone” is interesting. Early into her reign Victoria could not emphasize enough her desire to be on her own, to be independent and to be alone. However, now the idea of being alone made her miserable.

Without Albert’s support, Victoria was fairly self conscious of her ability as a ruler. Albert handled so much of the day to day responsibilities of governing. He wrote letters in her name, attended meeting with her ministers both with and without her and guided her opinions through sharing his own. Albert perpetuated Victoria’s self doubt in ruling as well. He wrote to the Duke of Wellington how unnatural it was for a woman to rule, and that it was a blessing and necessity it was that the Queen was married, for without a man to guide the country the people were doomed.<sup>154</sup> Historian Julia Baird suggests that Albert in fact encouraged Victoria to believe, or at least recognize, that his own education and political talents were superior to hers. Out of her devotion, Victoria believed him and granted Albert more authority to make him happy and assist her in her supposed weakness.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, the impact of Albert’s death made the Queen feel helpless. Not only was she without her confidant, but her political advisor as well. Her continued dependence on Albert even after he departed is evident in her letter to her Uncle Leopold declaring that it is

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<sup>152</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 311.

<sup>153</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 312.

<sup>154</sup> Prince Albert to the Duke of Wellington, 6 April 1850, in *Letters of the Prince Consort*, 156-158.

<sup>155</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 163.

“my firm resolve, my irrevocable decision, viz. that *his* wishes- *his* plans- about *everything*, *his* views about *every* thing are to be my law!”<sup>156</sup> Victoria was determined to use Albert’s beliefs as a guide for the rest of her reign, as she trusted his opinion more than any one else’s. This however could only last for so long.

Soon into her solo reign, Victoria came to recognize that depending on Albert after his death was not possible nor was it necessary. The Schleswig-Holstein question that was prominent between 1863 to 1864 particularly brought the Queen a new sense of confidence. This question regarded several complex treaties and diplomatic issues between the two duchies of Schleswig and Holstein and the nations they fell under either Denmark or the German Confederation. Schleswig was a part of Denmark prior to the twelfth century when becoming a duchy. Denmark was hoping to reintegrate the duchy under its crown. However, many of the citizens were German and close with the Holstein Duchy just south of them causing them to seek to maintain independence but align with the German Confederation. There were also several issues of inheritance surrounding the area as they were previously ruled by the same individuals but each area had different laws regarding inheritance that were set to cause an issues in their peace and unity. In 1852 the issue was set to resolved by the London Protocol that the UK recognized. However, the Protocol was facing disruption as the King of Denmark was childless and the line of inheritance that was agreed upon became more complex. England was concerned as they aided in the Protocol as well as sought to ensure that Germany would not obtain so much power in the northern parts of Europe and develop as a threat to England’s dominance of the sea there. Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister at the time, wrote “only three people have ever really understood the Schleswig-Holstein business

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<sup>156</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 24 December 1861, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria* 3:606.

– the Prince Consort, who is dead- a German professor, who has gone mad – and I, who have forgotten all about it.”<sup>157</sup> In response, Victoria threw herself into understanding and unraveling the issue. Victoria saw this as an opportunity to step up where Albert could no longer. In the end Victoria gave her government solid advice that they implemented to keep England out of a war. She later wrote to her eldest daughter, “I am glad darling Papa is spared this worry & annoyance, for he could have done even less than I can.”<sup>158</sup> This illustrates that Victoria had come to recognize that she was more than capable of ruling without Albert and in some aspects was even more capable than he was. Victoria began to understand that while Albert may have been more educated and a talented politician, she was stronger.<sup>159</sup> Victoria was more resilient, she was able to take on the work load and not have it overpower her to a point of making her ill like it did for Albert. She may not have been as perfect as her angel, but she was tougher and it was her reign that would outlast any other monarch up to that point.

With time and continued pressure from the government and the public, Victoria made more and more public appearances, opening galleries, opening parliament and hosting dignitaries. As the Queen entered her sixties her confidence and mood only improved. In 1879 the Queen became ill with a fever and cough, but she did not let this stand in the way of her political obligations as she would have previous to Albert’s death. She recalled that “I had no alternative.”<sup>160</sup> The role of

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<sup>157</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria: A Life*, 308.

<sup>158</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 320.

<sup>159</sup> Carolly Erickson, *Her Little Majesty: The Life of Queen Victoria*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 190-191; Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 421.

<sup>160</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 416.

the crown once again began to take priority in her life as it did previous to her marriage. This part of Victoria's reign was conducted fully on her own independence.

Of the Prime Ministers Victoria had after Albert's death, Benjamin Disraeli was her favorite. Disraeli certainly charmed the Queen, often referring to her as a "feary."<sup>161</sup> Disraeli was a Conservative and served as Prime Minister in 1868 until his party lost power that same year and then again in 1874 to 1880. He promoted several pieces of legislation on social projects regarding child labor laws, housing for the poor and water sanitation. For his dedication to these projects, and his flattering charm the Queen greatly favored him and eventually made him Earl of Beaconsfield in 1879.<sup>162</sup> However, no matter how well the two got along, Victoria refused to be influenced by him or any other. In a letter to her Uncle Leopold just days after Albert's death, Victoria declared that she was "determined that no one person, may he be ever so good, ever so devoted among my servants- is to lead or guide or dictate to me."<sup>163</sup> This statement was certainly one she stuck to. In regards to her relationship with Disraeli, Victoria was more than willing to put her foot down when they had varying views and when it came to issues regarding her rights as a queen. One such example is in reference to the Royal Titles Act that would allow Victoria to name herself the Empress of India. Victoria's eagerness for this title reflects her renewed desire to be a strong and powerful monarch, as well as her interest in political affairs. Disraeli also wanted her to have the title, but felt that the timing of it was not politically strategic. There were several

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<sup>161</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 400.

<sup>162</sup> Jonathan Parry, 2011 "Disraeli, Benjamin, earl of Beaconsfield (1804–1881), prime minister and novelist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14 Apr. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7689>.

<sup>163</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold the King of the Belgians, 24 December 1861, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria* 3:606.

concerns that the title implied a sense of imperialism which was not something that reflected British values. In addition, some felt that the title suggested a very close political relationship between the Queen and Disraeli that was frowned upon. Victoria stubbornly disagreed, forcing Disraeli to oblige her.<sup>164</sup>

Victoria in her later years was not fearful of stepping on anyone's toes or of working hard to get what she wanted. In 1884 she flooded the cabinet with letters demanding that the government act quickly and forcefully to overthrow Muhammed al-Mahdi who was working to free Egypt from English occupation.<sup>165</sup> The government under Gladstone, whom Victoria greatly disliked, did not act quickly enough and cost General Gordon his life. Gordon well respected British Army officer sent to the area to evacuate British people and those loyal to British occupation from the area. While there he was captured and eventually killed by those revolting. William Gladstone was a member of the Liberal Party and the Prime Minister from 1880 to 1874 and again from 1892 to 1894. Victoria greatly disliked Gladstone for his manner in conversing with her, in addition to his tone and his views against the abolition of slaves. She once stated that "He speaks to me as if I was a public meeting."<sup>166</sup> After the events in Egypt, Victoria was furious and publically sent telegrams to Gladstone and other members of his government expressing her dissatisfaction. This clear political bias greatly upset Gladstone and went against the lessons Albert had tried to teach

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<sup>164</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 403-406 and Parry, "Disraeli, Benjamin, Earl of Beaconsfield (1804–1881), Prime Minister."

<sup>165</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 371.

<sup>166</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, 2011 "Gladstone, William Ewart (1809–1898), prime minister and author," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14 Apr. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10787>.

the Queen regarding the crown being above politics.<sup>167</sup> This was on of many times that the Queen clashed with Gladstone. Despite Gladstone being well respected by her husband, Victoria stated that she “never COULD have the slightest *particle* of confidence” in him.<sup>168</sup> This again illustrates Victoria’s independence from Albert’s shadow and influence and renewed her strength and passion for ruling her country independently.

It was in these last forty or so years of her reign that Victoria shined the most. She was directly active in her government as opposed to working through or with the aid of Albert. It was during this time that the Queen celebrated how long lasting her reign was, and at each jubilee she noted her appreciation for her “devoted and loyal people” and would “thank my beloved people” often.<sup>169</sup> The resilience of Victoria is beyond compare, she experienced more loss at once than most other people in her position and yet she was still able to guide and direct a country, empire and people into the future. The historical Victorian Era was ultimately crafted and influenced by her independent self. Widowhood brought unimaginable sadness to Victoria’s life but also granted her an opportunity to rule uninfluenced, and alone like she had always wanted from the day she was notified of her uncle’s passing that June morning in Kensington Palace.

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<sup>167</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 371.

<sup>168</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 367.

<sup>169</sup> Queen Victoria, “Journal Entry,” 22 June 1887, in “Victoria,” Historical Royal Speeches and Writings, (London: The British Monarchy web site), 10 and 12



## Conclusion

Victoria ruled her beloved nation until the very day she died peacefully and surrounded by her vast family at the age of 81 on January 22, 1901. Up until the end she made every attempt to keep business going despite her significantly weakened and somewhat confused state. Just a week previous to her death, she was addressing ministers and discussing the conflicts that existed in Africa at the time.<sup>170</sup> Her reign was one of loss, independence, strength and growth. It was this same young girl who no one initially thought would become queen, except for her darling father, who led the country through war, expansion and various technological advancements. By the end of her reign, Victoria was the monarch of almost a quarter of the world's population and the head of an empire that had a foothold in almost every continent. Victoria rose above every expectation of her to become the longest reigning monarch in English history to that date ruling for sixty-three years, only to be surpassed by her great great granddaughter and the current Queen Elizabeth II, who is well into her sixty-sixth year on the throne.

Ever being the direct woman she grew into during her reign, Victoria left very explicit directions for how she wanted her funeral and burial to be conducted. In 1897 Victoria wrote out specific instructions for the proceedings and ensured they would always to be kept safe with the most senior individual who was with her. Each aspect of these final arrangements was purposeful

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<sup>170</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 592.

and reflective of the powerful Queen. Victoria insisted that her funeral be in the military style.<sup>171</sup> Until the day she died she wanted to be remembered as soldier's daughter as a way to keep her father alive and be connected to him despite hardly ever knowing him. His absence was hugely impactful for Victoria's entire life. It set her up to be searching for a father like figure for the majority of her childhood and young adulthood. To some extent Victoria was able to find this person in her maternal uncle, Leopold, and her first Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, and so she relied heavily on both men for advice and guidance. However, this reliance was on her own terms. Victoria had a number of individuals in her life that she could have relied upon for guidance but she selected these two men, she trusted them and ensured that their influence upon her was not overpowering or compromising to her own independence. She dreamed of her independence for far too long to let it be whisked away by those around her. Her father's militaristic past and training influenced her appreciation for and dedication to the military, as well as encouraged her to stand up to Lord Melbourne early into her reign in order to address her military upon horseback as previous kings had done. This style of funeral proceedings was meant to be simple and straightforward, as she wanted there to be little pageantry surrounding her death. She also insisted that her coffin only be carried by soldiers or her servants and never any undertaker.<sup>172</sup>

In addition to the militaristic style of the funeral, Victoria wanted to be in white. Ever since the death of her dearly loved Albert in 1861 almost forty years earlier, Victoria wore black at almost all times as a sign of her state of continual mourning. However, she saw her death and funeral as bittersweet; it was the end of her life but also the opportunity to be reunited with the love of her life and the man who became the center of her life and happiness for her twenty years

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<sup>171</sup> St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 598.

<sup>172</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 486.

of marriage. Albert's death shook Victoria to her very core. Towards the end of his life, Albert had a significant influence on the Queen. His influence was due to the combination of Victoria's love and trust in Albert, the strain her nine pregnancies put on, and the doubts Albert suggested about Victoria's ability to rule better than he could. This dependence was not something that came about willingly as some historians suggest. From very early into their marriage Victoria was adamant in restricting Albert's ability and access to political affairs and restricted some of his own independence. Victoria selected the men whom would surround the Prince in his daily life, without his input. In addition, she refused to discuss politics and matters of state with Albert as a way to keep her private life and employment as separate as possible. After his death, Victoria felt lost having been somewhat disconnected from the role during her back to back pregnancies and due to the loss of her closest advisor who would aid her in simplifying the matters presented to her and organized the work.

Involved in Victoria's lengthy instructions was a list of things she sought to have in the coffin with her. Among them were Prince Albert's dressing gown that their daughter Alice had embroidered; a plaster copy of Albert's hand; photos of Albert, their children and grandchildren; as well as rings given to her by Albert, her half sister Feodora, her mother, and her daughters Louise and Beatrice. Interestingly the Queen also requested to be buried with a number of belongings from John Brown to be placed in her hand, including his mother's wedding band, a leather case with his photo and lock of his hair in it, and one of his handkerchiefs.<sup>173</sup> John Brown was one of Queen Victoria's servants, born and raised in Scotland and chosen by Albert to become her personal servant who always led the Queen's pony when she stayed in Scotland. After Albert's death, Brown was brought to one of Victoria's English estates with her pony in hopes of improving

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<sup>173</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 487. St. Aubyn, *Queen Victoria: A Portrait*, 598.

her mood and he became her Highland servant, a prestigious role. Rumors spread that the two were lovers and that they married in secret. While there is little actual evidence to these claims, the Queen was very devoted to Brown as she appreciated his straightforward manner, honesty despite her position, and devoted loyalty to her. Victoria's children did not approve of the closeness or how frank Brown was with their mother, believing he did not show her the respect that her position demanded and overstepped his position.<sup>174</sup> As a result, they insisted that the items of his that were placed in the casket were to be covered from view by flowers.<sup>175</sup> In her hair lay white flowers around the base of the white veil that surrounded her, similar to her appearance at her wedding, one of her happiest days. Overall, Victoria's funeral was elegant and bright like she requested, but extremely solemn as to be expected as the people were saying farewell to their long reigning and deeply beloved queen. She defined an era, was the head of state for so many, her face was everywhere and for many she was the only monarch they had ever known.

Her influence and legacy did not end with her though. Due to Victoria's strategic planning and power, she was able to get her family a foothold in various nations across Europe. For this reason, she is known as the "Grandmother of Europe" to illustrate how extensively her blood has been spread across the continent. Victoria's eldest, Vicky grew to become the Empress of Prussia thanks to her marriage to Emperor Frederick III of Prussia and she gave birth to a son who would become Kaiser William II of Germany and to a daughter who became the Queen of Greece. Bertie, who later became Edward VII, married a Danish princess establishing alliances with that dynasty

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<sup>174</sup> K. D. Reynolds, 2017 "Brown, John (1826–1883), servant to Queen Victoria," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14 Apr. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-37231>.

<sup>175</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography*, 487.

and had a daughter who became the Queen of Norway. The lists of connections made goes on. Ultimately, between the marriages and grandchildren direct descendants of Queen Victoria can be found as the monarchs of Spain, Greece, Romania, Russia, Denmark, and Yugoslavia, as well as members of various lordships and duchies. Victoria and Albert's goal was to create a sense of influence and a way to maintain peace through these marriages. While this may not have succeeded, it did create an English influence and sense of power over the rest of Europe that is impressive.

Today Victoria is not only seen as this great matriarch but as the namesake of a complete era. Her reign was incredibly impactful and memorable. It would hardly be what it is known as today if not for Victoria's stubborn drive for independence during her reign. Many have found her life to be every intriguing as is seen in popular culture with films like "the Young Victoria" and "Victoria and Abdul," and TV shows like Masterpiece's "Victoria." Around the city of London her name graces several buildings, streets and monuments. Her image is found at almost every gift shop in the city in the form of mugs, ornaments, plates, towels, posters and so much more. Something about this extraordinary woman has sparked the interest of people even over a hundred years later, all trying to understand how this young girl came to rule over so much of the globe for so long.

When she was young Victoria sought to be alone, uninfluenced and utterly independent making her mature and prepared beyond her years when coming to the throne. Of course she still was a young eighteen-year old girl with no experience in the ways of governing a country so some guidance was required. Thankfully Victoria had her dear Lord Melbourne to rely on. His guidance was indispensable for the young Queen, as she looked to him as a guiding father figure as she stepped into her new role as queen. However, this did not mean that Melbourne controlled the Queen. Victoria had no problem disagreeing with her first Prime Minister no matter how much she

admired him. As time went by Victoria fell in love with her darling Albert. While she thought the world of her Prince and wanted to give him every happiness, Victoria was determined to keep her role as queen separate from him at least in the early years of their marriage. However, her numerous pregnancies with nine children that were all fairly close together combined with difficult postpartum depression forced her to rely heavily on Albert to assist her with royal duties. Albert was a natural in the position, allowing the Queen to trust and rely on him even more. Albert's death in 1861 changed everything about the Queen's life. She lost her companion, confidant, political advisor and angel. Now she found herself the mother of nine fatherless children, the youngest only three years old, and a queen without an advisor, private secretary or consort. While she did fall into a deep state of mourning, duty called and Victoria could not turn away. In these last forty years of her reign, Victoria ruled more or less completely on her own, without any permanent advisor but her own conscience. During this time the empire experienced war, growth, wealth, and technological advancement. Despite Victoria's early desire to be alone, she never truly was. Yes, she was alone in the sense of her continual independent nature in ruling, but she was always surrounded by those who cared and loved her until her last dying breath, leaving behind a profound legacy.

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