



THE TWO VICTORIAS – THE CONSTRAINED AND THE STRONG-WILLED

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The life of the most depicted and written about monarchs, Queen Victoria, was full of twists that set her life on a path that she would never walk by herself, but always accompanied by shadow figures such as her mother, Sir Conroy or even her own husband, in the game of power, dominance and even love. Her life could be divided into two parts. One that depicts a disturbing portrayal of her as the most powerful woman of her times who was also controlled by the aforementioned figures, and the other of a woman finally liberated from all the ties constraining her freedom. This article traces and analyses events in Victoria's life that shaped her character and constituted the feeling of constraint, and events that inevitably led her to being liberated from them and allowing to show her strong will and character.

Keywords: *Queen Victoria, the Kensington System, Prince Albert, John Brown, Munshi*

Introduction

The role of a monarch is not an easy one. It requires much strength and a well-balanced mind that will be able to hold the responsibilities of the tasks that lie ahead. Within royal families, when the succession is set and the next in line is determined there is no surprise as to what to expect and which way the royal education should be carried out. However, when looking back to times of Queen Victoria and her predecessor, William IV, this was not as obvious state matter as one might expect. The legacy of the British monarchy was not so easily decided and the next in line was yet to be appointed. Such was the air of Victoria's birth. From the very moment of her birth on 24th May 1819, her life was to be decided by others. This article aims to analyse different moments from Queen Victoria's life that influenced her as a person, as well as to show how the conditions she was raised in and that were also predominant during her marriage shaped her and led Victo-



ria to being more dominant and strong-willed in her later years. Only by understanding the constraints that were prevalent in Victoria's life are we able to understand how important it was for her to feel liberated, no longer controlled or even manipulated later on.

Depending upon which aspect the historians focus on, they can look for works referring to Victoria's political achievements and struggles, relationship with Prince Albert, her children, John Brown or Abdul Karim. The published works, both modern findings and those contemporary to Victoria, provide the reader with various angles from which her life is analysed. There are indeed some works which tend to evade particular aspects of Victoria's life by merely mentioning certain uncomfortable moments or even omitting them. This approach, common in early years after Victoria's death, was taken simply to glorify the persona of a perfect monarch. When reading Longford's *Victoria R.I.*, one receives a detailed description of almost every single day in Victoria's life. The more modern book by Lucy Worsley, *Queen Victoria, Daughter, Wife, Mother, Widow* has a very approachable style, making it easy to take in the history without being overwhelmed by the excessive number of facts and data that at times do not bring much to the general understanding of the discussed topic. Yet, it is the reader who, in the end, must draw the conclusion rather than be presented with the findings of the author.

This article does not focus on what one commonly understands as biography but rather on certain aspects, moments, events from Victoria's life that shaped her character. The many widely available accounts describing the Queen's life and addressing numerous events allow the close analysis of factors that turned a young, vivacious, yet controlled girl into a monarch who had to find her own way to liberate herself from various limits set by the morals of the time or by her own family. The aim of this article is to present selected moments that allow the understanding of how dominated the life of young Victoria was and on top of that how this controlled environment affected her later decisions.

Victoria - the constrains of family

The very first, and perhaps the most important, event that led to irreversible change in Victoria's character was the death of Prince Edward, her father. This unfortunate circumstance created a situation



that left a mother and an infant in a very perplexing setting. This left them prone to influence and the ambitions of others such as John Conroy - a man who sought social advancement all his life. The Duchess, a German, remained quite unpopular in Britain and grew very close with Conroy. She depended on him in all aspects concerning her life – from being her private secretary, counsellor, political agent, confidant, even to, as some rumoured, being her lover. Together they designed a rather adverse way of raising Victoria called “the Kensington System” or simply “the System”.¹ It was a vast, refined and quite hostile set of rules that were to oppress and control the life of Princess Victoria in every possible manner. The System assumed a complete isolation from her surroundings, even the family. It allowed only a select few to be around the young Victoria. The aim was to mould the Princess into a person utterly weak and dependent on her mother and subsequently on Conroy himself.² Victoria’s every step was closely monitored, her every action controlled. If it were possible, her thoughts would have been subjected to strict scrutiny as well. Once it became apparent that she would eventually inherit the throne, Conroy implemented an even more vile approach trying to force his appointment as her personal secretary and treasurer. The System introduced a rigorous regime consisting of day-long studies in decorum, reading, writing, as well as learning languages such as Greek, Latin, Italian, French and German. It also aimed to create a specific public image of Victoria. Conroy, aware of the unpopularity of the previous kings, wanted young Victoria to be perceived as pure, devoted, and modest.³ Thus, together with the Duchess, they would set out on the so-called tours around Britain with a main goal to make the nation grow fond of their future Queen – the Nation’s Hope.⁴ The outside observer might perceive the System as a clever strategy. However, Victoria, unlike any other girl of her age, was subdued to public scrutiny, especially during her social debut. She spent the summer of 1835 on one of the perfectly staged tours meant to introduce the Princess to the affection of the English people. Meanwhile, behind closed doors, Victoria suffered great physical and mental pain. She found it difficult to cope with the hormonal chan-

1 Vallone, Lynne (2001) *Becoming Victoria*. New York: Yale University Press. p. 47.

2 Ibid, p. 59.

3 Ibid, p. 61-62.

4 Worsley, Lucy (2018) *Queen Victoria: daughter, wife, mother, widow*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. p. 58.



ges, as well as the constant observation of her person and manner. She suffered from migraines and exhaustion; always on display, on duty, never left alone.⁵

When holidaying at Ramsgate, Victoria felt too sick and unable to leave her bedroom for two days. Nonetheless, the illness was not the worst that would happen to Victoria. The most dramatic and poisonous blow fell upon her from the sight of her mother, and Conroy himself who wanted to use this situation and have her agree to make him Private Secretary and chief advisor. Conroy even threatened to lock up Victoria if she did not agree to follow his instructions.⁶ Yet, she resisted. With the support of the devoted Baroness Lehzen, Victoria did not succumb to the bullying and eventually, after three long weeks, managed to overcome the illness. The historians do not agree whether Victoria suffered from typhoid fever, which was common at that time, or from salmonella. Nevertheless, the ultimate treatment of quinine gave the anticipated results and Victoria finally resumed writing her journal. The disastrous holidays in Ramsgate showed not only how malignant the System was, but also made Victoria completely change her view of her mother. She had always despised Conroy, but now, seeing how he had poisoned her mother, Victoria turned against the Duchess and never regained trust in her. She could not understand how her own mother “did nothing without Conroy’s advice & whatever was told by him”.⁷ Through the above description of Victoria’s early to teenage years, it is easy to observe how manipulative and controlling her surrounding was. Even people who were supposed to be the loved ones, closest to her, had an underlying agenda in their actions that was to create a future queen dependent on them so they could, in time, profit from having a marionette sitting on the throne. Indeed, the constrained environment did not allow any space for a healthy development of the young girl. Sadly, such a limited space continued to exist later in Victoria’s life, even within the marriage to Prince Albert.

Victoria, for whom marriage was a shocking alternative⁸ to living in a proximity of her mother, married Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha at the age of 21. Indeed, unlike other royal marriages, this one was based on actual affection they shared and not only political ambitions. Vic-

5 Ibid, p. 60.

6 Ibid, p. 65.

7 RA VIC/ADDA/12, part three 8-13 June 1837 as found in Worsley, Lucy, op. cit., p. 69.

8 Woodham-Smith, Cecil (1972) *Queen Victoria*. New York: Black Five Books, p. 175.



toria was in love. When reading her diaries she had kept throughout her whole life, we see a woman completely submissive, reliant on her Angel, as she called her husband. The quote below perfectly depicts the emotions the two shared and how Victoria herself described the love she had for him. which also indicates the blinding affection the Queen had.

we embraced each other over and over again, and he was so kind,
So affectionate; oh! To feel I was, and am, loved by such an Angel
As Albert, was too great delight to describe! He is perfection; perfection
In every way, - in beauty - in everything! I told him I was
Quite unworthy of him and kissed his dear hand.⁹

The above passage that was recorded before the wedding depicts young love, but it is already visible how Victoria saw herself – as unworthy. This belief and attitude will be perceived till the very end. Even in her marriage vows, contrary to suggestions, when “the archbishop asked Victoria if she promised to ‘obey’ her husband, he got a strong, loud, positive response”.¹⁰

Albert was Victoria’s Angel. However, as a man of knowledge and strong character, it was difficult for Albert to find himself a position within the household that would not be diminutive. In his letter to William von Lowenstein, Albert wrote that indeed he was “very happy and contented; but the difficulty in filling my place with the proper dignity is that I am only the husband, not the master in the house”.¹¹ With this dissatisfaction of his position held, Prince Albert tried to overtake some of Victoria’s duties as he felt himself to be better acquainted with matters concerning ruling. This was a predominant case as two months into their marriage, Victoria became pregnant. She found this new state extremely difficult to bear as she did not have quite the appeal towards raising children. For her, having offspring was a burden, an unwelcome consequence of the passionate moments she had with her husband. It was during her first pregnancy when Victoria fell dependant on Albert and allowed him to share the heaviness of daily dealing with the boxes, ministerial visits and many other issues connected with governing the country. Albert found this new position welcoming and slowly began overpowering his wife in her duties. He made Victoria completely dependent on him. When he was

9 As quoted in *The life of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert* [online]; <https://www.goethe.de/ins/gb/en/kul/ser/arc/vll/21618114.html>

10 Worsley, Lucy, op. cit., p. 145.

11 Albert to William von Lowenstein, May 1840, as quoted in Hobhouse, Hermione (1983) *Prince Albert: His Life and Work*. London: SN Books Ltd. p. 26.



away, she could hardly bear it. Quite often she noted in her memoirs: “I feel lonely without my dear Master”, “I pray God never let me to survive him”.¹² “He is King to all intents and purposes... while she has the title he is really discharging the function of the Sovereign”; “Formerly the Queen received the Ministers alone, but now husband and wife did it together, and both of them always said We – We think, or wish, to do so and so”.¹³ Politically and domestically she leant on him completely. This only proves how deeply the control was engraved in her. She moved from one source of constraint, which was her mother and Conroy, to another one – her husband. With time, he managed to gain such a great impact on the Queen that he was referred to as a “king-in-all-but-name”.¹⁴ Under his guidance “the crown constantly desired to be furnished with accurate and detailed information about all important matters”.¹⁵ He wanted to make sure he could hold the ministers to account in every aspect. It was he who devised a complicated system of filing all notes. Albert believed he could not delegate his work to anyone else and he fully devoted himself to running the country apart from running his family and participating in many duties he was chosen to or he himself had undertaken. With this vision in mind, he also found a role for his wife – a role that was far from being what Victoria was – a mother rather than a queen. Even though Victoria detested being pregnant and simply could not bear looking after the children, he felt that they kept her occupied enough for him to assume more duties.¹⁶ During a decade of pregnancies, Victoria’s mental state underwent dreadful changes with instances of postnatal depression. Seeing the state of disintegration that Victoria was in, the surrounding people treated her with a mixture of toxic concern and control. This was especially visible in Albert’s attempts to control her emotions when commenting on her behaviour “You have again lost your self-control quite unnecessarily”, “I do my duty towards you even though it means that life is embittered by scenes”.¹⁷ Such situations led to Victoria slowly checking her feelings to avoid any further clashes with Albert. In times when the arguments between Victoria and Albert were over

12 Martin, Theodore (1880) *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort 1819-1861* Cambridge University Press. Vol. 1-5. p. 276.

13 Greville, Charles (1885) *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1852*, London. Vol. 2/3. p. 323. [online]; <https://archive.org/details/cu31924088004225>

14 Worsley, Lucy, op. cit., p. 167.

15 Weintraub, Stanley (1997) *Uncrowned King: The Life of Prince Albert*. New York: The Free Press. p. 352.

16 Worsley, Lucy, op. cit., p. 171.

17 RA VIC/MAIN/Z/140/60-3 as found in Worsley, Lucy, op. cit., p. 172.



their children, he could be extremely bitter, unfair and devastating, commenting that he “shall have nothing more to do with it; take the child away and do as you like and if she dies you will have it on your conscience”.¹⁸ These are obviously not words of a loving, devoted, kind man that Victoria described in her journals. It is obvious that Victoria saw only what she wanted to see and thus, she pictured a life of love, devotion and generosity. She did not see that her personal desires at one point became subordinate to his. “My chief and great anxiety is – peace in the House...”¹⁹ – she wrote after one of Albert’s outbursts. One can easily claim that Victoria submitted herself to her husband in the very same way her mother submitted herself to Conroy, thus continuing the life of constraint and control.

Another example showing the conflicted and quite restrained environment Victoria was in relates to her beloved governess, Baroness Lehzen, who was the only person that Victoria could relate to in her young days. She took care of her, literally raised her and was the only counterweight to the System. However, she was highly detested by Prince Albert as he had always perceived Lehzen as a rival for Victoria’s love, as the one who attracted all the attention. According to Hibbert, there could be no question of Lehzen’s devotion and love for the Queen. Nonetheless, with time, this admiration grew to extreme jealousy and conviction that “no one but she could take proper care of the Queen as she had done in the past”.²⁰ The constant disagreement over the person of Baroness Lehzen caused many arguments between Prince Albert and the Queen. As Albert noted, “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 confidante... Victoria is too hasty and passionate for me to be able often to speak of my difficulties. She will not hear me out but flies into a rage and overwhelms me with reproaches and suspiciousness, want of trust, ambition, envy etc. There are therefore, two open ways to me: (1) to keep silence and go away... (2) I can be still more violent (and then we have scenes...)”.²¹ Thus, at the end of 1842 he designed Lehzen’s departure from Windsor and albeit very sad and broken, Victoria had to again bend her character to the dominant’s will.²²

18 RA VIC/ADD/U2/4 18 January 1842 as found in Worsley, Lucy, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

19 RA VIC/ADD/U2/4 19 January 1842 as found in Worsley, Lucy, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

20 Hibbert, Christopher, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

21 RA/ADD U2/2, 16 January 1842 as found in Worsley, Lucy, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

22 Hibbert, Christopher, *op. cit.*, p. 155.



In all this, Victoria always declared herself grateful to Albert for all his work and relieving her from the tiresome duties. For this reason, it felt easy for Victoria to succumb to the many changes that Albert introduced in the royal household. The manner of Albert's behaviour stemmed from his German upbringing, his love for order and sense in everything that was done. He did not enjoy being close to the household, thus, he distanced himself and his family from those who surrounded them as much as possible. He was claimed to be cold, stiff, even unpleasant. He introduced self-control and regime, not only in regard to himself, but also to Victoria and the children. He made Victoria keep a notebook where she recorded her tempers and other behaviours he deemed as unwelcome and which he would later read and issue comments. He dealt with Victoria the very same way he would deal with his children in terms of behavioural correctness. Even though the constant adoration toward her husband is visible in Victoria's journals, it is certain he made her feel inferior to him in terms of intellect and morals. It was far from a marriage of equals. Indeed, Victoria was the Queen, however, in all other aspects, she was made to feel inadequate and subordinate. In moments of ill-temper, Albert would punish Victoria with withdrawal to his rooms where he would devote himself to even more work.²³ Despite being treated by him in such a harsh way, in her own words to her daughter, Vicky, Victoria stated "no one could be as blessed as she with such a husband: he was her father, protector, guide, adviser in all and everything; she might even say her mother as well as her husband."; "no-one was ever so completely altered in every way as she had been by her dearest husband's blessed influence".²⁴

Taking into consideration all of the above presented facts, one receives quite an unusual portrayal of Victoria. On one hand, the Queen of a vast empire, successful in many fields and on the other hand, a woman completely overpowered and governed, initially by her own mother and her accomplice, and later cast into a blind submission by her controlling and authoritative husband. Astonishingly enough, even after Albert's death, Victoria remained, in the eyes of the nation, devoted and loyal to the memory of her late husband who died December 14, 1861 to typhoid fever. Albert died in the Blue Room, in the presence of the Queen and five

23 Ridley, Jane (2017) *Victoria and Albert: a marriage of misery?* [online]; <https://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/queen-victoria-marriage-prince-albert-unhappy-husband/>

24 Fulford, Roger (1968) *Dearest Child: Letters Between Queen Victoria and the Royal Princess 1858-1867*, p. 44. [online]; <https://archive.org/details/dearestchildpriv0000vict>



of their nine children. This death left Victoria extremely devastated and made her close herself off. She wore black for the rest of her life becoming known as “the Widow of Windsor”.²⁵ During the time after Albert’s death, her weight increased significantly as the result of comfort eating which she turned to once there were no watching and controlling eyes from her husband. This secluded her even more from the public eye.²⁶

The constrain that accompanied Victoria through her life shaped her relationship with her children. The limited and strict upbringing Victoria was subjected to created a web of oppression and restraint that came to life with the birth of her children and continued to overshadow her decisions. It is widely acknowledged and agreed upon by many historians such as Hibbert, Longford, or even Worsley, that the Queen, even though she gave birth to nine children, was not a fond and dotting mother, as she considered pregnancy as an unwanted, sad result of an intimate relationship with Prince Albert. She very much enjoyed this relationship as she often proved herself to be passionate and ultimately devoted to her Angel. As a result of this great affection, she conceived distressingly soon after the wedding. Once Victoria realised this she remarked “I was in for it at once & furious I was”; “the greatest horror of having children and would rather have none”.²⁷ She described herself when pregnant as “ugly & enormously fat, more like a barrel than anything else”²⁸.

Within seventeen years, Victoria gave birth to nine children – five girls: Victoria (1840), Alice (1843), Helena (1846), Louise (1848), and Beatrice (1857); and four boys: Albert (1841), Alfred (1844), Arthur (1850), and Leopold (1853). When Vicky was born, Victoria was greatly disappointed by the child being a girl, as she knew that now she would have to get pregnant again to produce a male heir to the throne. According to her “it would have been better politics to have produced a male heir straight away, as she and Albert had so hoped and wished for. We were, I am afraid, sadly disappointed”.²⁹

25 Hobhouse, Hermione (1983) *Prince Albert: His Life and Work*. London: SN Books Ltd. p. 150-151.

26 Ridley, Jane (2017) *Forty years of comfort-eating* [online]; <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/forty-years-of-comfort-eating>

27 As quoted in Pakula, Hannah (1997) *An Uncommon Woman*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. p.104.

28 RA VIC/MAIN/QVLB/ 10 November 1840 as found in Worsley, Lucy (2018) *Queen Victoria: daughter, wife, mother, widow*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. p. 151.

29 As quoted in Woodham-Smith, Cecil (1972) *Queen Victoria*. New York: Black Five Books. p. 216-217.



To Victoria, her children were those who kept her dear Albert away from her. At one point she stated, “all the numerous children are as nothing to me when he is away; it seems as if the whole life of the house and home were gone”.³⁰ “I find no special pleasure or compensation in the company of children, I only feel properly a *mon aise* & quite happy when Albert is with me” as she carried on expressing her feelings.³¹ After each pregnancy, Victoria retreated from the politics more and more, becoming more dependent on her husband. When she gave birth to Vicky, she did return to her state quite swiftly. However, after giving birth to Bertie, she suffered rather severe postnatal depression, “my poor nerves were so battered... I suffered a whole year from it”.³² The Queen experienced vision impairment “spots on people, which turned into worms”, “coffins floated before her eyes”.³³ Victoria understood that her mental state was an illness that came and went but was distinctly connected with pregnancies. She clearly addressed the discomfort of being pregnant so quickly, however, Albert persisted on having more children. He also hoped that they would occupy the Queen to such an extent that they would allow him to assume more power and responsibility, moving the Queen away from these duties at the same time.³⁴

All of the above paints Victoria in a completely different light to what the readers of common works or commercial film viewers are accustomed to. In a more recent ITV Series *Victoria*³⁵, the Queen is presented in a more approachable way. This created a vision of a lost girl controlled in every step by her mother and her accomplice, and later on by Albert who, albeit quiet, was able to make Victoria more compliant with his opinions and wishes. Nevertheless, with time, she emerged as a woman driven by physical passion towards her husband, willing of her own accord, to become submissive and agreeing to ascend to an inferior role to that of her husband’s. Still a Queen in name,

30 Benson, Arthur Christopher, Esher, Reginald Brett (1908) *The Letters of Queen Victoria. A selection from Her Majesty's correspondence between the years 1837 and 1861*. Vol.1-3/3. London. p. 240. [online]; <https://archive.org/details/lettersqueenvic00bensgoog>

31 As quoted in Ponsonby, Frederick, edited by Welch, Colin (1951) *Recollections of Three Reigns: Prepared for the Press with Notes and an Introduction by Colin Welch*. London: Staples Printers, p. 85. [online]; <https://archive.org/details/recollectionsoft0000pons/page/n7/mode/2up>

32 Weintraub, Stanley, op. cit., p. 137.

33 Worsley, Lucy, op. cit., p. 172.

34 Ibid, p. 171.

35 *Victoria*, (2016-2018), Created by Daisy Goodwin, ITV



but more often a Hausfrau to her Albert. Throughout the years of their marriage, she showed herself to be extremely emotional and vivacious which had to be trimmed down by her husband. She enjoyed his company. However, she did not so much enjoy the company of their children. The constant control she had been subjected to as a child in later years turned into resentment of her own children and, after Albert's death, an obsessive control of them that lasted till Victoria's death in 1901. She made sure that her children always remembered she was not only their mother but also their Sovereign, so while they could rebel against their mother they could not do so against their Queen. The constraints, if no longer having a human face, were still there and were never to fully cease.

It is quite visible to even those who are not well read, and to those who share a keener eye into the life of the glorified Queen, that her life up to the death of her husband was subjected to different forms of control - her mother and sir Conroy, Lehzen, Prince Albert, and even Lord M. Thus, it is not a surprise that once Victoria was left without the guidance of her beloved husband, to whom she submitted so willingly, she was lost, as if she were a small child without parental guidance. However, faced with this new, solitary situation, the Queen had to accept it in some way. She no longer felt the need to be told what to do, reminded what is right or should be done. As always, headstrong, she was more eager now to express her own will and whims, her passions and wants, her acceptance or disapprovals. She did remain faithful to the memory of her beloved husband, adorning herself in black. However, as the words below will show, she became liberated, free, more expressive of herself. Her constraining knots were no longer there - only the memory of the past people looming in her head were able to limit her, but that too was to fade away.

Victoria - the strong-willed woman

With time passing and the sorrow overwhelming her after Albert's death diminished, Victoria set her mind onto one thing vital for her - to continue in an unchanged way the life's work of her husband. In her work, she continued to idolise Albert and remained obedient to the idea that her husband had represented. She would be restless, even furious at the sole thought of any kind of intrusion to her plan, stron-



gly expressing herself - "I am anxious to repeat one thing and that one is my firm resolve, my irrevocable decision, that his wishes – his plans – about everything, his views about everything are to be my law! And no human power will make me swerve from what he decided and wished".³⁶ Thus, she became restless and unbreakable. Once she set her mind upon something, she was unwilling to change. Nevertheless, this glorified devotion separated her immensely from her nation - a nation that was undergoing changes and needed their Queen.

With time, and with all her children somehow settled in somewhat convenient marriages, Victoria regained her balance and optimism. The devastating loss of her husband dwindled down to a permanent ache. She was now ready to enter what would later be known as the Golden Age, a new stage in her life; a stage that was accompanied by new companions and new emotions. One such new companion who assisted the Queen with her everyday life in more of a behind the scenes way rather than an openly public way, was one of Albert's ghillies, John Brown, who accompanied the couple on many visits to Balmoral, Scotland. They were simply charmed by the marvellous and magical scenery of the woods and hills, and Victoria developed a strong emotional connection with the Scottish people.³⁷ For the Queen, John Brown became more than just a servant – a confidant or a partner to the prosaic life, someone who shared her passions and was truly devoted to her. With time, Brown's name began dominating Victoria's journals and he became known as the Queen's Highland Servant. He was to take orders only from the Queen herself and no one else could interfere.³⁸ His appearance and character were domineering as he was quite direct and confident in his manners. He often addressed the Queen with the word *woman*, ordering her to sit still while he was fastening her in her saddle.³⁹ On one occasion, a passer-by heard Brown shouting at the Queen while pinning her cloak to hold her head up. However, Victoria did not seem to mind. On the contrary, she felt admired and cherished, protected, and comforted by this honest and open man. He

36 RA VIC/Letters, III, 1908, p. 474-5. as found in Benson, Arthur Christopher, Esher, Reginald Brett (1908) *The Letters of Queen Victoria. A selection from Her Majesty's correspondence between the years 1837 and 1861*. Vol.1-3/3. London, [online]; <https://archive.org/details/lettersqueenvic00bensgoog>

37 Ashdown, Dulcie (1975) *Queen Victoria's Family*, London: Robert Hale & Company p. 76-77.

38 Ibid, p. 130.

39 Longford, Elizabeth (1966) *Victoria R.I.* London: Pan Books. p. 406.



was sympathising, understanding and unselfish. He was a friend that Victoria needed at that time.⁴⁰ It is noticeable that Brown's presence helped to improve Victoria's wellbeing. She did feel a bit uncomfortable in the beginning, but she came to terms with the fact that she needed a man to lean on, not to marry; a man, not a machine; someone who would share her worries and could take care of her.⁴¹ It was more than obvious that the Queen was perhaps infatuated with Brown. There was gossip circulating that stated Victoria had secretly married her servant and was referred to in elegant drawing-rooms as Mrs Brown.⁴² Even though the public was widely commenting on the character of Brown, Victoria remained naïve and oblivious to all the gossip and even kept providing fresh evidence supporting the stories. Many scholars would agree that she did share some warm feelings towards him in her own way, however, it is difficult to state whether she loved him or not. He treated her as a woman whereas everyone else treated her as a queen. All this kept her further away from her family. The closer she was with John Brown, the more distant she became from her children. The fact that he had such an immense impact on the Queen was quite disturbing for the family and the closest circle. In her letter to the Queen, Mrs M.A. Murray writes asking her 'dear Queen' to step down and let her beloved son act as a regent as long as Victoria is alive. The criticism was vast and seemed never-ending. It was unthinkable that a servant would come before any member of the family – whether in a royal household or otherwise. The Queen's advisers were desperate. No one could force her to change her mind. No one could force her to sacrifice Brown in order to put an end to the rumours and the storm within her family.⁴³ Indeed, Brown spoke freely to Victoria's children and oftentimes ordered them the very same way he ordered the Queen to keep her composure. He quarrelled with Prince Alfred, ministers, and Private Secretaries; however, he was never the one to apologize the first. Victoria knew of all this, but she preferred to turn a blind eye.⁴⁴ She was finally free from the conveniences created by her controlling mother and her husband. Victoria no longer had to abide by the opinions and wishes of those who surrounded her. Finally, no

40 Ashdown, Dulcie, *op. cit.*, p.130.

41 Longford, Elizabeth, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

42 *Ibid*, p. 409.

43 *Ibid*, p. 413.

44 Hibbert, Christopher, *op. cit.*, p. 326.



one was trying to manipulate her into acting in a certain way or take over the power in her hands. She had someone by her side who did not wish any of the power or influence. It is true that John Brown helped Victoria go through the unhappy years after Albert's death. However, he rooted himself quite deeply within the Queen's life. On the rare occasions when she would drive out in London, the people could see the same man constantly occupying the driver's seat. He would even attend the more important public outings. On one occasion, when the ministers asked the Queen to be present at a review in Hyde Park, she insisted much to the ministers' dismay, to be accompanied by Brown. The Queen declared that she would not be dictated or made to alter any of her plans.⁴⁵ This perfectly depicts the change that happened in the character of the Queen. She no longer blindly agreed to the decisions made by others, but finally, freely made her own choices whether liked by others or not. Brown was seen by others as a coarse animal behaving quite roughly towards the Queen. However, she felt perfectly comforted around him. In the book written by the Queen herself, *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*, published in 1868, she depicts Brown quite prominently. She states at one point that "his attention, care and faithfulness cannot be exceeded, and the state of my health, which of late years has been sorely tried and weakened, renders such qualifications most valuable and indeed most needful".⁴⁶ In March 1883 John Brown got infected with erysipelas which made him unable to attend to the Queen for the first time in eighteen years. Two days later he died, leaving Victoria heartbroken, what she described in her journal: "The comfort of my daily life is gone – the void is terrible – the loss is irreparable".⁴⁷

Victoria, with her strong character unwilling to bend or follow someone's expectations, had the extraordinary gift of enjoying unique relationships with her servants. Her journals, later transcribed by her daughter Beatrice, bear many names of servants such as dressers and

45 Ibid

46 RA/QV, note to entry for 16 Sept. 1850 as found in Victoria, Queen of Great Britain, edited by Helps, Arthur (1868) *Leaves from the journal of our life in the Highlands, from 1848 to 1861 [microform]: to which are prefixed and added extracts from the same journal giving an account of earlier visits to Scotland, and tours in England and Ireland, and yachting excursions*. New York: Harpers and Brothers Publishers [online]; <https://archive.org/details/leavesfromjourna0000vict>

47 Baird, Julia (2016) *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography of a Woman*. London: Random House. p. 406.



maids Singer, Peneyvre, Skerret, and Dehler⁴⁸ who became more than just regular servants, but rather enjoyed the position of confidants. That is why it was only natural for the Queen that a few years after the death of her John Brown another servant appeared next to her. This time, however, it was even more difficult for the family to stomach their mother's choice for she found closeness and understanding, or even shared maternal feelings towards an Indian male servant, Abdul Karim. With time they grew quite close, and Karim was bestowed the title of 'Munshi'. She showered him with trinkets, gifts and even land. Her zest for life was again awoken by this new figure in her life and she was unwilling to give in to the constant allusions of her family regarding the conduct of Munshi. Victoria felt free again and was willing to pursue new passions, especially when she became known as the Empress of India in 1876. In August 1887, Karim started teaching Hindustani to the Queen – "I am learning a few words in Hindustani. It is a great interest to me for both the language and the people, I have naturally never come into real contact with before".⁴⁹ Indian curries cooked for the Queen by Munshi expanded her interest in the culture and people of India in a most delightful way. In the craze of the coming Golden Jubilee, this slim and clever character again stirred the imagination of the royal environment with the same if not a bigger magnitude than John Brown had done years earlier. It is applaudable that the Queen brought dark-skinned people to the court, hence banishing any racial prejudice. However, Karim's person became more than just an example of racial equality. Victoria arranged for him to have a seat among her ladies-in-waiting, entrusted him with private correspondence and even some confidential papers which raised serious concerns among the ministers and the family. Her behaviour again showed more of her character rather than the suggested approach of such a conservative family. She was no longer willing to stand the insinuations or even open attacks on her servant and reacted with fierce anger, thus expressing her emotions and unbreakable character even more sternly.⁵⁰ She desperately needed someone to love, and, in Karim, she found a substitution of a son that would love her no matter what, unlike her real children.⁵¹ Victoria expressed her love as well as

48 Worsley, Lucy, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

49 Hibbert, Christopher, *op. cit.*, p. 446.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 451.

51 Worsley, Lucy, *op. cit.*, p. 313.



her need to be loved and understood instead of being constantly ordered and subjected to the power struggle around her.

Conclusion

The life of Queen Victoria presents a variety of fields upon which one could focus their research. Even though her life was full of dominating people, submission and strong willingness, Victoria was not willing to fully give herself up and let herself be controlled, especially in her later life, and managed to survive in many different conditions. The turbulence of Victoria's life, both political as well as private, gives food for more than just a short analysis. Studying different aspects of her life, the attitude towards her ministers, the intricate and difficult relations she had with her own children, the intimacy of her relationship with Albert and even the ill mother-daughter relationship she shared with the Duchess of Kent can be the source of many more academic as well as non-academic publications. The available works of major names as Hibbert, Longford, Worsley, Strachey and many more, create a world that allows the reader to learn and meet Victoria not only as a Queen but also as a passionate woman, educated female opposing the feministic movements yet giving grounds to the same movements by her own work and strength. Through the available sources emerges a picture showing how certain events affected Victoria and her character. It is also easy for the reader to see how the conditions in which the Queen was raised shaped her and later in her life affected the many relationships she had. First part of Victoria's life was filled with control, submissiveness, and dysfunctional family relationships. Her later life depicts her as a woman driven by her strong will, a woman that is ready to follow her own comfort, to be the controlling one now rather than subdue herself to the control of the new generation.

As the Grandmother of Europe⁵², even in her final hours she was surrounded by her family, children, grandchildren. She outlived her beloved Albert, she outlived two of her nine children, Alice and Affie, and even some of her grandchildren. But she had the numerous Houses of Europe surrounding her. The Kaiser was resting her in his arms.

52 Queen Victoria was given the sobriquet 'Grandmother of Europe' as many of her children married into European royal households and subsequently also did her grandchildren. Queen Victoria's line survived in such countries like Denmark, Sweden, Romania, Greece, Russia, Germany, and Spain.



Victoria died on January 22, 1901. As her final wish she was dressed in a white dress and her wedding veil. Before passing, she ordered a few mementos to be put alongside her in the coffin. These included one of Albert's dressing gowns, a plaster cast of his hand, a lock of John Brown's hair and a picture of him which were placed in her left hand and concealed with the veil. This little secret of hers was the final act of her personal freedom she enjoyed so much. A strong sovereign, she tried to remain in charge of her private life as much as possible and openly opposed her children who wanted to subject her to control again.

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