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# Victoria: The Girl Who Would Become Queen

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# Victoria: The Girl Who Would Become Queen

## **Abstract**

This research reviews the early life of Queen Victoria and through analysis of her sequestered childhood and lack of parental figures explains her reliance later in life on mentors and advisors. Additionally, the research reviews previous biographical portrayals of the Queen and refutes the claim that she was merely a receptacle for the ideas of the men around her while still acknowledging and explaining her dependence on these advisors.

## **Keywords**

Queen Victoria, England, British History, Monarchy, Early Life, Women's History

# Victoria: The Girl Who Would Become Queen

By Lindsay Richwine

“I am very young and perhaps in many, though not in all things, inexperienced, but I am sure that very few have more real good-will and more real desire to do what is fit and right than I have.”<sup>1</sup> –Queen Victoria, 1837

Queen Victoria was arguably the most influential person of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ruling in an era that was turning its back on monarchies and the personal rule of the 1700s, Victoria not only survived and adapted to a new way of ruling, she managed to exercise enormous influence on the culture and politics of the time. So influential a figure has been the subject of her share of biographies over the years, and each biographer forms a different opinion on the woman that gave her name to an age. These portrayals differ greatly; some, like the Reverend John Rusk and others writing in the years immediately following her death, sanitize and sanctify her “Beautiful Life and Illustrious Reign” and others like Jerome Blum maintain that Victoria was merely a receptacle for the agendas of the powerful men around her.<sup>2</sup> The truth, as always, lies somewhere in the middle. Over the years,

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<sup>1</sup> Queen Victoria, *Extract from the Queen’s Journal*, 20 June 1837, in *Queen Victoria’s Early Letters*, ed. John Raymond (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1963), 142.

<sup>2</sup> John Rusk. *The Beautiful Life and Illustrious Reign of Queen Victoria: A Memorial Volume. An Accurate and Authentic Account of the Late Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India, Relating the Incidents and Events of Her Public and Private Life, Together with a Summary of the Splendid Achievements of Her Reign, Sketches of Royalty, and the Leading Statesmen of Her Time. Also a Concise History of England and Her Colonies During the Victorian Era.* ([Chicago?]: K.T. Boland, 1901).

scholarship on Victoria has found this middle ground, with the most recent biographers such as Julia Baird giving what appears to be the most holistic portrait of the Queen. Neither a perfect ruler nor a weak figurehead, Victoria ruled during a very significant era in British—and world—history. Her task was not an easy one. At times, she handled her position with grace and at times she made enormous mistakes. Despite her iconic status and fame, the best approach to any study of her life is to understand her humanity. In order to explain her later public persona and political career, it is necessary to examine her early life to find out who she was and how she viewed the world. It is therefore the object of this research to give due credit to the role Victoria's experiences in child and young adulthood had in shaping her legacy. The circumstances of Victoria's upbringing explain her later actions and give the historian a more complete picture of this iconic figure. Though the young Victoria sought out and to some extent relied on mentors as a consequence of her sequestered and controlled upbringing, she was by no means an empty vessel into which her mentors poured their agendas. Navigating a challenging political climate and the end of personal rule, Victoria was able to adapt to these changes without ceding her power or presence.

Born into an England reveling in the defeat of Napoleon yet reeling from the madness of King George III and the sins of his philandering sons, Victoria and the other possible heirs were in a position to change the course of British history. Though relatively quiet and respected during the early years of his reign, as he aged, George III suffered from a variety of ailments that left him deaf, blind, and mentally unstable. He claimed to hear voices and often stripped naked and ran through the palace shouting that his skin was on fire.<sup>3</sup> Victoria's "wicked uncles", George IV and William

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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), 7-8.

IV, were adulterous carousers who ruled England irresponsibly, squandering public funds and abusing their power.<sup>4</sup> Victoria's own father, Edward, the Duke of Kent, was somewhat quieter than his brothers about his self-indulgence. However, he had a reputation for extravagancy and lived with a mistress for years until he abandoned her for a legitimate union with Victoria's mother when it became apparent that a child of his could be ruler of England.<sup>5</sup> Though eloquent and progressive and reputedly possessing a kind heart, the Duke had a sadistic streak evident in his military days.<sup>6</sup> Edward was forced into retirement from his command for the excessively brutal punishments he meted out that sparked mutiny in his ranks.<sup>7</sup> In the years of their reigns, the British public lost trust in the monarchy and began to view the whole family as debauched and entitled. Taking this into account, it makes sense that Victoria adopted the attitude to morality that she did in later years in order to dispel some of the conceptions about the monarchy. The task that lay before her was not an easy one, and the circumstances of her childhood both prepared her and provided obstacles to her growth.

The Duke died unexpectedly when Victoria was still an infant, leaving the child and her mother in a mountain of debt from which the Duchess's brother Leopold, later king of Belgium, had to rescue them.<sup>8</sup> Though Victoria never knew her father enough to miss him at his death, his early departure affected her for the rest of her life in two ways. First, growing up without a father meant that Victoria sought a father figure for the rest of her life. This

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<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Thompson, *Queen Victoria: The Woman, the Monarchy, and the People* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *Queen Victoria*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, *Queen Victoria*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Longford, *Victoria: Born to Succeed* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1964), 25.

partially explains her attachment to various made advisors throughout her life, something for which she would suffer criticism. The other consequence of her father's death is that it left the Duchess in need of a consort. Unfortunately for Victoria, this meant that her mother grew quite close with John Conroy, an Irishman who was the former equerry to the Duke. Charming and manipulative, Conroy became the most trusted advisor of the Duchess.<sup>9</sup> She and Conroy were the same age; both were materialistic and ambitious and soon after the Duke's death a flirtatious relationship developed between the two.<sup>10</sup> Conroy exercised enormous influence on the Duchess and attempted to control Victoria, hoping to become indispensable to a young girl who could be queen. Though Victoria never allowed Conroy to succeed in his attempts to manipulate her, she harbored resentment against him for the rest of her life.<sup>11</sup>

Although Conroy was not able to control Victoria, this was not through lack of trying. In the spring of 1830, it became evident that Victoria would one day inherit the crown. This realization provoked the Duchess to alter Victoria's lifestyle, placing her on a regimented schedule and altering her education to better prepare her for life as Queen.<sup>12</sup> It is in this period that the Duchess and John Conroy began to crack down on Victoria. One of the ways in which they attempted to rule her was through the Kensington System, a plan devised by Conroy and implemented by the Duchess. The Kensington System, so called because they resided in Kensington Palace, was created under the guise of preparing

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<sup>9</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Dormer Creston, *The Youthful Queen Victoria* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1952), 97.

<sup>11</sup> Lynne Vallone, *Becoming Victoria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Paula Bartley, *Queen Victoria* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 24.

Victoria for life as Queen. In fact, it kept Victoria totally isolated from children other than Conroy's own, and under constant, oppressive surveillance.<sup>13</sup> Per her mother's instructions, Victoria was never to be left alone. Someone always stood watch over her in an otherwise empty room, held her hand while walking down the stairs, looked on as a maid arranged her hair, assisted her in dressing and undressing, and guarded her as she lay in bed until the Duchess came up the stairs.<sup>14</sup> Surely some of the Duchess' control sprang from concern for her daughter's safety—she mandated that every meal Victoria took be tasted first to ensure she had not been poisoned as she was worried about possible threats from Victoria's uncles. However, it is difficult to argue that the overbearing supervision of Victoria was not at all intended to control her behavior. Though Victoria was not aware of her place in the line of succession until she was ten, the Duchess was well aware of the possibility of Victoria becoming queen.<sup>15</sup> The Duchess and Conroy were very conscious of the power they could have if her daughter were to become Queen.

The efforts of the Duchess and Conroy to orchestrate every part of Victoria's young life had a profound effect on her. While she was young, the Duchess and Conroy embarked on what biographer Susan Kingsley Kent called "a campaign of disparagement, belittlement, and emotional abuse of the princess".<sup>16</sup> Insulting her appearance, intelligence, and ability to rule, Conroy attempted to undermine Victoria's confidence and make her dependent on him. However, he underestimated Victoria's pluck and never was able to achieve his goal.

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Kingsley Kent, *Queen Victoria: Gender and Empire* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 17-18.

<sup>14</sup> Creston, *The Youthful Queen Victoria*, 103.

<sup>15</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Kent, *Gender and Empire*, 18.

While she wanted for nothing materially in her childhood, Victoria's upbringing was lonely and strict, governed by her domineering and power-hungry mother who sacrificed her daughter's well-being for her own ambition. Victoria spent the years after her father's death struggling against this environment. She became a stubborn and obstinate ward, often defying her tutors and caretakers, bucking at any ultimatums and instructions. When told by her piano teacher that she must practice, Victoria slammed the lid of the piano and yelled "There! You see there is no *must* about it!".<sup>17</sup> Lehzen, her devoted caretaker, was at first appalled by the child's outbursts of temper.<sup>18</sup> Drawn by some biographers as the stereotypical spoiled only child, Victoria was at times selfish and difficult but was equally tender and lively in turn. This stubborn streak, developed in retaliation to the oppression in her childhood, would become a hallmark of her personality in later years. Instead, Victoria fought back and developed a stubborn streak that would frustrate people she worked with but made her a formidable Queen. Her stubbornness both helped and hurt her as it established her ability to be decisive but also alienated others throughout her life.

Victoria's difficult temperament in her childhood may have had a much greater effect on her later life if it were not for the influence of her governess, Fraulein Louise Lehzen. Lehzen, as she was called by Victoria, was the daughter of a Lutheran pastor. Hailing from German lands just like Victoria's mother, the governess raised Victoria from the age of five. High-strung, prone to headaches, and occasionally tactless, Lehzen did not cut the most graceful figure but was nevertheless kind-hearted and well-

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<sup>17</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), 34.



liked by those she worked with.<sup>19</sup> Stern but utterly devoted to her young pupil, Lezhen was Victoria's bulwark. While curbing Victoria's impudence and temper, Lezhen encouraged Victoria's independent spirit and strength of character and gave her the unshaking support she did not receive from the Duchess. In turn, Victoria adored her "Dear Lezhen" and appreciated her immensely for the support she received from her.<sup>20</sup> The governess would be instrumental in both the emotional and academic development of the young queen.

A bright but not necessarily academic child, Victoria nevertheless seemed to do well in her lessons. She was instructed in languages, religion, history, geography, arithmetic, and English. Her tutor, the Revd George Davys, came to Kensington Palace when she was only four years old and began to teach her letters.<sup>21</sup> In her childhood, Victoria developed a penchant for the arts which continued throughout her life. She was a rather accomplished watercolorist and sketch artist—she always kept up these hobbies and sketched many of her friends and family members throughout her life.<sup>22</sup> She frequently attended the opera, theatre, and ballet, and was "very much amused indeed" by many performances, always commenting on them in her diaries.<sup>23</sup> Victoria studied music as well, signing in a "sweet, reliable voice" and playing the piano decently well.<sup>24</sup> Her penchant for artistic expression was most likely related to her controlled childhood. Victoria needed an outlet, and she found it in the arts.

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<sup>19</sup> Longford, *Queen Victoria: Born to Succeed*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Strachey, *Queen Victoria*, 34.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Monica Charlott, *Victoria: The Young Queen* (Cambridge: B. Blackwell, 1991), 50.

<sup>23</sup> Bartley, *Queen Victoria*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Charlott, *Victoria: The Young Queen*, 50.

Victoria's reign may have been very different without the influence of Lehzen. She was able to act as a mother when the Duchess failed to do so, and her presence was a stabilizing factor that contributed to the future success of the Queen. Because of the attitude of the Duchess and Conroy, Victoria had to seek out mentors early in her life, a practice she would maintain throughout her life.

Another important mentor and supporter throughout her childhood and later life was her Uncle Leopold, King of the Belgians. Eccentric, elegant, and kind to his niece, Leopold was a colorful individual. He cut an unusually flamboyant figure, frequently adorning himself in feather boas and three-inch heels. He had an obsession with drizzling, the process of melting down gold and silver tassels to make metal, and he inexplicably propped his mouth open with wedges of gold as he slept.<sup>25</sup> Victoria adored her "Dear Beloved Uncle" and often reminisced about visits made to him.<sup>26</sup> She was always happier visiting the King and his wife Louise in Claremont or making trips with them to the sea.<sup>27</sup> They wrote letters to each other through their whole lives wherein Victoria frequently asked for advice and shared details of her life. He lived with the Duchess and Victoria while she was a young child, so Leopold was the closest thing Victoria had to a father figure in her early life. She was nearly devastated when he had to stop living with the family when he became King. He, like Lehzen, was a constant support for the young queen, and helped greatly in her personal development and protection, often supporting her against her mother and Conroy.

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<sup>25</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Queen Victoria to Leopold, King of the Belgians, 2 January 1837, in *Queen Victoria's Early Letters*, ed. John Raymond, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, 47.

Leopold gave Victoria support in what is an early example of her capability to stand up for herself. When Victoria was a teenager, she was struck deathly ill while on a tour of the North. Conroy refused to acknowledge that anything was really wrong with Victoria, maintaining that it was just a cold and saying that it would be bad for the public's view of her if they thought she was ill. Leopold jumped to the young girl's defense and berated Conroy for his carelessness. However, this did not seem to have much impact on the ever-ambitious Conroy as he took the opportunity to approach Victoria about ensuring her mother's position as her regent should the King die before her eighteenth birthday. He also asked Victoria to make him her official private secretary.<sup>28</sup> Even in her weakened state, Victoria mustered the fortitude to refuse. Conroy flew into a rage at her flat refusal and attempted to force a pen into her hand to sign the document that would make him secretary. He berated her too, shouting at her and calling her foolish and incapable of ruling.<sup>29</sup> However, Victoria held firm a display of her stubborn streak that sometimes served to protect her from people like Conroy. This story alone proves Blum's portrayal of a weak Victoria incorrect; no spineless ruler would have behaved as she did, especially not as sick as she was. This fortitude Victoria had to develop growing up under the pressure of her mother and Conroy ensured that she could never be passive.

Historians have characterized Victoria's childhood in a variety of ways over the years. In a 1901 biography written shortly after Victoria's death, Reverend John Rusk, Ph.D. paints her childhood in idyllic pastels, omitting any trials and loneliness she may have faced and mentioning only that from time to time she wished for companions of her own age.<sup>30</sup> For Rusk, the constant

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<sup>28</sup> A.N. Wilson, *Victoria: A Life*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 66-67.

<sup>29</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, 37

<sup>30</sup> Rev. John Rusk, *The Beautiful Life*, 50.

surveillance and controlling behavior of the Duchess is simply “the watchful eye of that wisest of mothers”.<sup>31</sup> Later biographers have drawn a better picture of the struggles and joy she faced in her childhood. Along with many other modern authors, Monica Charlot’s 1991 biography describes alongside the good times a “much darker side” to the childhood of the Queen. While some more modern authors claim that Victoria’s childhood was not as bleak as she described it, the accounts of loneliness and constant surveillance that characterize Victoria’s childhood do not just come from her description. Writing to Victoria later in life, Feodora says that her “only happy time was going or driving out with you and Lehzen; then I could speak and look as I liked. I escaped some years of imprisonment, which you, my poor darling sister, had to endure after I was married.”<sup>32</sup> In order to fully understand Victoria and her actions in the early days of her reign, it is essential to understand the trauma of her childhood.

When Victoria became queen, her first request was for time alone. She moved her bed out of her mother’s room, where it had been since her birth.<sup>33</sup> With these steps Victoria began to assert her independence as the new sovereign. However, though she was determined to gain her independence from her mother and Conroy, she was still a teenager, completely inexperienced and unsure of how to proceed on her own. The interesting paradox created by her upbringing is that, though Victoria longed to assert her independence and had within her a stubborn streak developed in years of fighting Conroy and her mother, she had never been allowed to operate on her own. Consequently, Victoria had not had any practice making her own decisions and began to look for

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<sup>31</sup> Rev. John Rusk, *The Beautiful Life*, 65.

<sup>32</sup> Charlot, *Victoria: the Young Queen*, 52.

<sup>33</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, 60.

mentors to assist her. She found in her prime minister, Lord Melbourne, exactly the advisor she was looking for.

Victoria grew to adore Lord Melbourne. Separated by a forty-year age gap, Melbourne became another father figure for the young queen. Jerome Blum calls the relationship between Victoria and Melbourne “one of the most endearing episodes in the long history of the British crown”.<sup>34</sup> For Victoria, Melbourne was a constant companion and mentor. Victoria held him in the highest esteem and always found conversations with him to be immensely enjoyable. Unfortunately, it was because of her devotion to Melbourne that Victoria encountered her first real crisis. In an episode that demonstrated where her stubborn streak could lead her astray, Victoria alienated Sir Robert Peel and the Tory party in her desperation to keep the man who had become her father figure and closest advisor. In May of 1839, Melbourne’s Whig government lost a major vote and resigned, turning the seat over to Sir Robert Peel and the Tories. When Victoria heard this news, she burst into tears and excused herself to her bedroom.<sup>35</sup> The turnover of the government would mean that Lord Melbourne would leave her side. This is not something Victoria wished to go through again—she had already suffered enough when her Uncle Leopold had left during her childhood. Her dismay at the departure of Melbourne grew worse when Peel asked that some of the ladies of her bedchamber that had connections with Whig politicians be dismissed and replaced with ladies with Tory connections.<sup>36</sup> This was too much for the young queen, and in retaliation, she stubbornly put her foot down and refused to let any women go, starting a standoff with Peel that ultimately ended in his

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<sup>34</sup> Jerome Blum, “Ch. 5—Great Britain: A New Era,” in *In the Beginning*, 155-198 (Charles Scribner’s Sons: New York, 1994), 158.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>36</sup> Kent, *Queen Victoria: Gender and Empire*, 43.

resignation and the return of Lord Melbourne. However, this particular display of Victoria's stubbornness ultimately weakened the power of the monarchy as Parliament put restrictions on the power of sovereigns in order to prevent this from happening again.<sup>37</sup> Though ultimately a poor political move on the part of the Queen, it is obvious why a teenager with Victoria's background would act in such a way. She had to work for much of her reign to make up for this early mistake.

Despite her early mistakes, age and lack of experience, Victoria generally made a good impression on those around her who initially underestimated her. Often praised for her "silvery voice" and self-possession, her presence calmed those embittered by the immorality and ineptitude of the kings that came before her.<sup>38</sup> Victoria began to find her identity as a ruler with the help of Melbourne and others. Soon though, Victoria felt the pressure to marry, and she proposed to Albert, a German prince who would become the love of her life.

Victoria first met Albert at the age of sixteen when he visited England with his brother Ernst. Victoria adored having them to keep her company. They were both artistic, musical and entertaining; Victoria found much in common with them and relished their presence to fix the loneliness that was so constant in her youth.<sup>39</sup> Several years later, Albert returned and Victoria fell head over heels in love with him even though she had previously been wary of marriage so soon. She wrote to her Uncle Leopold, "My feelings are a *little* changed, I must say, since last Spring,

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<sup>37</sup> Blum, "Great Britain: A New Era", 159-160.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson, *Victoria: A Life*, 68.

when I said I couldn't *think* of marrying for *three or four years*; but seeing Albert has changed all this".<sup>40</sup>

Victoria is criticized by some for blindly falling in line with many of Albert's policies. Undeniably, she was highly influenced by Albert and began to adopt many of his views on morality and governing.<sup>41</sup> However, though she adored him, she also reminded him from time to time that she was the ruler of England, not he. One example of this is in a letter in which she denies him the two-week honeymoon he wished for, writing emphatically, "*You forget, my dearest Love, that I am the Sovereign, and that business can stop and wait for nothing*".<sup>42</sup> It is clear in this passage that Victoria is comfortable reminding Albert of her power. In later years, Albert took on a more central role, as Victoria experienced a string of pregnancies that left her unable to perform her regular duties. Albert took advantage of this opportunity and established himself in a powerful position. However, it was never Victoria's wish that Albert take her place in doing the duties of the sovereign. Both loved power and did everything they could to ensure that their position was not compromised.<sup>43</sup>

Though Blum and others have argued that Victoria exclusively took on the beliefs of whatever man she was attached to at the moment, there are many instances wherein Victoria asserts her own independence. Several of these are detailed in letters to and from Victoria and her male advisors. In one, Victoria explicitly rejects her Uncle Leopold's suggestion that her husband-to-be, Albert, be made a Peer in the House of Lords. Victoria adored Leopold because of his kindness towards her in her

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<sup>40</sup> Queen Victoria to the King of the Belgians, 15 October 1839, in *Queen Victoria's Early Letters*, ed. Raymond, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Blum, "Great Britain: A New Era", 165.

<sup>42</sup> Victoria to the Prince Albert, 31 January 1840, in *Queen Victoria's Early Letters*, ed. Raymond, 40.

<sup>43</sup> Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, 135.

childhood and frequently asked his advice on matters. However, this adoration did not prevent her from sharing her opinion on his suggestion; she states in an 1839 letter that she sees “everything against it and *nothing* for it”.<sup>44</sup> This is not the statement of an empty vessel. Victoria could and did assert herself in disagreements with her advisors, no matter how much their advice meant to her. This is not to say, though, that she never struggled to voice her opinions. In the minutes of a meeting between Lord Melbourne and Baron Stockmar, one of Prince Albert’s most trusted confidants, Melbourne mentions that the Queen admitted to avoiding the discussion of political matters with Albert. He believes that Victoria does this because of a “fear of difference of opinion, and she thinks that domestic harmony is more likely to create difference”, and encourages her to begin discussing political matters with Albert, even if they disagree.<sup>45</sup> This is not surprising. It is important to remember that Victoria, strong queen that she may be, was still just a young girl trying to figure out how to sustain a relationship, an area in which she has no experience and very little guidance. The only guidance seems to come from her Uncle who in fact instructed Victoria to do the opposite of what Melbourne told her. Leopold expressed his wish that “there *never* can arise, I hope, an occasion for any disagreement even on trifling subjects” between Victoria and Albert.<sup>46</sup>

One can imagine Victoria’s situation. She was young, still only twenty-one years old, surrounded by powerful older men who are all bombarding her with advice. She was capable and finding

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<sup>44</sup> Queen Victoria to the King of the Belgians, 26 November 1839, in *Queen Victoria’s Early Letters*, ed. Raymond, 38.

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum by Mr. Anson: Minutes of Conversations with Lord Melbourne and Baron Stockmar, 28 May 1840, in *Queen Victoria’s Early Letters*, ed. Raymond, 43.

<sup>46</sup> The King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria, 4 February 1840, in *Queen Victoria’s Early Letters*, ed. Raymond, 41-42.



her place and power as a queen. She was still a bit out of her league simply because of her age and lack of experience. On top of that, throughout her entire life she had to buck against people attempting to influence her decisions. It is easy to sympathize with this woman, who was really still a girl, trying to find her voice amongst all these powerful personalities. Despite all of this, she managed to hold her own and even showed a bit of a sense of humor about it. In a letter to Albert, she pokes some fun at her Uncle Leopold, telling Albert that Leopold wrote her to say that he is upset that she has not been asking him for advice as of late. On this matter, Victoria commented that “dear Uncle is given to believe that he must rule the roast everywhere.”<sup>47</sup> Though Victoria was influenced by these men and occasionally was forced to give the reins of power to them, she was by no means an unwilling monarch or a conduit for their agendas.

The study of Victoria’s early life is not meant to exonerate her and make her a saint. It is meant only to explain her actions and give her the recognition for her reign that she deserves. To claim that Victoria wielded significant power in her own right is not to say that she never made the mistake of relying excessively on advisors—she did do so, and quite often. However, this examination of the effects of her early life is necessary to understand the position of the Queen. Victoria was remarkable for operating in the era that she did and coming from a background like hers. Though at the time of her coronation a very young and quite inexperienced girl, Victoria came to govern one of the most influential empires in the world and was, at the time of her death, well-loved and revered by her people. Though reliant on advisors as a side effect of her sequestered childhood and family situation, Victoria exercised her own will effectively as a monarch and made

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<sup>47</sup> Queen Victoria to the Prince Albert 8 December 1839, in *Queen Victoria’s Early Letters*, ed. Raymond, 39.

her mark on British society. Though not always a perfect or completely independent ruler, Victoria is redeemed by her determination to succeed in her position.

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