

## QUEEN VICTORIA

Anyone who possesses spiritual or political courage has made up his mind to a prospect of immutable mutability; but even in a "transformation" there is something catastrophic in the removal of the back scene. It is a truism to say of the wise and noble lady who is gone from us that we shall always remember her; but there is a subtler and higher compliment still in confessing that we often forgot her. We forgot her as we forget the sunshine, as we forget the postulates of an argument, as we commonly forget our own existence. Mr. Gladstone is the only figure whose loss prepared us for such earthquakes altering the landscape. But Mr. Gladstone seemed a fixed and stationary object in our age for the same reason that one railway train looks stationary from another; because he and the age of progress were both travelling at the same impetuous rate of speed. In the end, indeed, it was probably the age that dropped behind. For a symbol of the Queen's position we must rather recur to the image of a stretch of scenery, in which she was as a mountain so huge and familiar that its disappearance would make the landscape round our own door seem like a land of strangers. She had an inspired genius for the familiarising virtues; her sympathy and sanity made us feel at home even in an age of revolutions. That indestructible sense of security which for good and evil is so typical of our nation, that almost scornful optimism which, in the matter of ourselves, cannot take peril or even decadence seriously, reached by far its highest and healthiest form in the sense that we were watched over by one so thoroughly English in her silence and self-control, in her shrewd trustfulness and her brilliant inaction. Over and above those sublime laws of labour and pity by which she ordered her life, there are a very large number of minor intellectual matters in which we might learn a lesson from the Queen. There is one especially which is increasingly needed in an age when moral claims become complicated and hysterical. That Queen Victoria was a model of political unselfishness is well known; it is less often remarked that few modern people have an unselfishness so completely free from morbidity, so fully capable of deciding a moral question without exaggerating its importance. No eminent person of our time has been so utterly devoid of that disease of self-assertion which is often rampant among the unselfish. She had one most rare and valuable faculty, the faculty of letting things pass--Acts of Parliament and other things. Her predecessors, whether honest men or knaves, were attacked every now and then with a nightmare of despotic responsibility; they suddenly conceived that it rested with them to save the world and the Protestant Constitution. Queen Victoria had far too much faith in the world to try to save it. She knew that Acts of Parliament, even bad Acts of Parliament, do not destroy nations. But she knew that ignorance, ill-temper, tyranny, and officiousness do destroy nations, and not upon any provocation would she set an example in these things. We fancy that

this sense of proportion, this largeness and coolness of intellectual magnanimity is the one of the thousand virtues of Queen Victoria of which the near future will stand most in need. We are gaining many new mental powers, and with them new mental responsibilities. In psychology, in sociology, above all in education, we are learning to do a great many clever things. Unless we are much mistaken the next great task will be to learn not to do them. If that time comes, assuredly we cannot do better than turn once more to the memory of the great Queen who for seventy years followed through every possible tangle and distraction the fairy thread of common sense.

We are suffering just now from an outbreak of the imagination which exhibits itself in politics and the most unlikely places. The German Emperor, for example, is neither a tyrant nor a lunatic, as used to be absurdly represented; he is simply a minor poet; and he feels just as any minor poet would feel if he found himself on the throne of Barbarossa. The revival of militarism and ecclesiasticism is an invasion of politics by the artistic sense; it is heraldry rather than chivalry that is lusted after. Amid all this waving of wands and flaunting of uniforms, all this hedonistic desire to make the most of everything, there is something altogether quiet and splendid about the sober disdain with which this simple and courteous lady in a black dress left idle beside her the sceptre of a hundred tyrants. The heart of the whole nation warmed as it had never warmed for centuries at the thought of having in their midst a woman who cared nothing for her rights, and nothing for those fantastic duties which are more egotistical than rights themselves.

The work of the Queen for progressive politics has surely been greatly underrated. She invented democratic monarchy as much as James Watt invented the steam engine. William IV., from whom we think of her as inheriting her Constitutional position, held in fact a position entirely different to that which she now hands on to Edward VII. William IV. was a limited monarch; that is to say, he had a definite, open, and admitted power in politics, but it was a limited power. Queen Victoria was not a limited monarch; in the only way in which she cared to be a monarch at all she was as unlimited as Haroun Alraschid. She had unlimited willing obedience, and unlimited social supremacy. To her belongs the credit of inventing a new kind of monarchy; in which the Crown, by relinquishing the whole of that political and legal department of life which is concerned with coercion, regimentation, and punishment, was enabled to rise above it and become the symbol of the sweeter and purer relations of humanity, the social intercourse which leads and does not drive. Too much cannot be said for the wise audacity and confident completeness with which the Queen cut away all those cords of political supremacy to which her predecessors had clung madly as the only stays of the monarchy. She had her reward. For while William IV.'s supremacy may be called a survival, it is not too much to say that the Queen's

supremacy might be called a prophecy. By lifting a figure purely human over the heads of judges and warriors, we uttered in some symbolic fashion the abiding, if unreasoning, hope which dwells in all human hearts, that some day we may find a simpler solution of the woes of nations than the summons and the treadmill, that we may find in some such influence as the social influence of a woman, what was called in the noble old language of mediæval monarchy, "a fountain of mercy and a fountain of honour."

In the universal reverence paid to the Queen there was hardly anywhere a touch of snobbishness. Snobbishness, in so far as it went out towards former sovereigns, went out to them as aristocrats rather than as kings, as heads of that higher order of men, who were almost angels or demons in their admitted superiority to common lines of conduct. This kind of reverence was always a curse: nothing can be conceived as worse for the mass of the people than that they should think the morality for which they have to struggle an inferior morality, a thing unfitted for a haughtier class. But of this patrician element there was hardly a trace in the dignity of the Queen. Indeed, the degree to which the middle and lower classes took her troubles and problems to their hearts was almost grotesque in its familiarity. No one thought of the Queen as an aristocrat like the Duke of Devonshire, or even as a member of the governing classes like Mr. Chamberlain. Men thought of her as something nearer to them even in being further off; as one who was a good queen, and who would have been, had her fate demanded, with equal cheerfulness, a good washerwoman. Herein lay her unexampled triumph, the greatest and perhaps the last triumph of monarchy. Monarchy in its healthiest days had the same basis as democracy: the belief in human nature when entrusted with power. A king was only the first citizen who received the franchise.

Both royalty and religion have been accused of despising humanity, and in practice it has been too often true; but after all both the conception of the prophet and that of the king were formed by paying humanity the supreme compliment of selecting from it almost at random. This daring idea that a healthy human being, when thrilled by all the trumpets of a great trust, would rise to the situation, has often been tested, but never with such complete success as in the case of our dead Queen. On her was piled the crushing load of a vast and mystical tradition, and she stood up straight under it. Heralds proclaimed her as the anointed of God, and it did not seem presumptuous. Brave men died in thousands shouting her name, and it did not seem unnatural. No mere intellect, no mere worldly success could, in this age of bold inquiry, have sustained that tremendous claim; long ago we should have stricken Cæsar and dethroned Napoleon. But these glories and these sacrifices did not seem too much to celebrate a hardworking human nature; they were possible because at the heart of our Empire was nothing but a defiant humility. If the Queen had stood for any novel or fantastic

imperial claims, the whole would have seemed a nightmare; the whole was successful because she stood, and no one could deny that she stood, for the humblest, the shortest and the most indestructible of human gospels, that when all troubles and troublemongers have had their say, our work can be done till sunset, our life can be lived till death.