

PLEASANT HOURS

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VICTORIA, QUEEN OF ENGLAND.

On the 24th of May, 1819, a little blue-eyed girl-baby was born into the world at Kensington Palace.

When the "little English May-flower," as her German grandmother loved to call the Princess Victoria, first saw the light, it was by no means certain that she was heir to the throne of England.

The Duke of Kent died just eight months after the birth of his daughter. He was one of the most popular of the royal princes, and his death was much regretted. He never seemed to entertain any doubt as to his infant daughter's succession to the throne, and used constantly to hold her up in his arms and say to his friends: "Look at her well! She will one day be Queen of England." Upon his death the Duchess of Kent sent for her brother, Prince Leopold, and from that moment he devoted a fatherly care and love to the Princess Victoria.

THE QUEEN'S CHILDHOOD.

The Duchess of Kent and Prince Leopold, in view of the uncertainty which surrounded the prospects of the little Princess, wisely resolved that she should be kept in ignorance of the great destiny which in all probability lay before her. The Duke of Kent, at his death, had left his widow and daughter "without means of existence." The Duchess lived quietly enough during the Queen's childhood. She was anxious to guard her daughter from the merest chance of hearing that she was regarded as the future Queen of England. Born of a thrifty German race herself, she looked with horror upon the extravagance of the members of the House of Hanover, and took care to inculcate lessons of a far different nature in the mind of the Princess,—lessons which afterwards bore rich fruit and beneficially affected in no small degree the prosperity of England.

George IV. died when the Princess Victoria was twelve years old, and as there was only the life of an old man of sixty-five between her and the throne, it was thought judicious to tell her now for the first time of the great prospect that lay before her. So imminent was this prospect deemed

by the nation, that a Bill was brought into Parliament, making the Duchess of Kent Regent, should her daughter be called to the throne before completing her eighteenth year.

The little Princess received the news with a calmness and a deep sense of the responsibility involved in so important a position, which would be surprising in a child of twelve, were it

in those days was scarcely suited to youth and purity. This, and her absence from the drawing-rooms, gave great offence to the Royal Family, and the occasional storms that arose from these causes were the only events that rippled the calm of our Queen's girlhood.

THE QUEEN'S ACCESSION.

When William IV. died (June 20th,

not without justice. It was very extraordinary, and something far beyond what was looked for. Her extreme youth and inexperience, and the ignorance of the world concerning her, naturally excited intense curiosity to see how she would act on this trying occasion, and there was a considerable assemblage at the Palace. The doors were thrown open, and the Queen entered, quite plainly dressed in mourning. She bowed to the Lords, and took her seat, and then read her speech in a clear, distinct, and audible voice, without any appearance of fear or embarrassment. As the two old men, her uncles, knelt before her, swearing allegiance and kissing her hand, I saw her blush up to the eyes, as if she felt the contrast between their civil and natural relations, and this was the only sign of emotion she evinced."

THE QUEEN'S HUSBAND.

In 1836, when there appeared every probability of the Princess Victoria becoming Queen of England, and at no distant date, and when King Leopold began seriously to consider the union of the cousins, Baron Stockmar writes as follows: "Albert is a fine young fellow, well grown for his age, with agreeable and valuable qualities; and who, if things go well, may in a few years turn out a strong, handsome man, of a kindly, simple, yet dignified demeanour. It can be imagined with what eyes of interest the young prince regarded the fair-haired, blue-eyed girl whom his relatives destined for his future wife, and by whose side he would probably sit on the throne of England.

In 1838, King Leopold wrote to the Queen, suggesting that some decisive arrangement regarding the marriage should be made for the year 1839, when she and the Prince would be twenty years old; but the Queen decided against this. Her reasons were excellent. She thought herself and the Prince too young, and also suggested that he should make himself complete master of the English language before the question of marriage should recur. A year later she again writes to her uncle, deprecating any haste as regards the marriage. The



QUEEN VICTORIA.

not for the remembrance of the care and thought that had surrounded her with all good influences and kept her from all evil ones, throughout her childhood.

The next six years were spent quietly enough. The Duchess of Kent took endless pains to ensure her daughter the best education that could be given and the finest moral training. The Princess was carefully kept away from court, the atmosphere of which

1837) speculation was rife as to the character of the young Queen. Her mother had kept her in such jealous seclusion that no one knew anything about her. "The King died at twenty minutes after two, and the young Queen met the Council at Kensington Palace at eleven. Never was anything like the first impression she produced, or the chorus of praise and admiration which is raised about her manner and behaviour, and certainly