

QUEEN VICTORIA AND HER REIGN.

A Biography, with references to the Literature, Art,
Commerce, and National Development of
the last fifty years.

THERE has probably never been a period in the history of the world when such vast and beneficent changes have taken place in all matters relating to the welfare of mankind, as in the reign of Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, and Empress of India. These changes have not, indeed, resembled the sudden convulsions of nature, which uproot forests, overthrow mountains, turn the course of rivers, and devastate the world; but are rather to be compared to the effect of the gentle summer rain, which distills through the soil till it reaches the very roots of vegetation, and clothes the earth with a mantle of beauty. For it is a happy peculiarity of the material and social improvement characterising the nineteenth century, that it reaches to the lowest condition of life; and the masses of the people have perhaps derived more solid advantages from it than have any other classes of society. It is true that the surroundings of existence are now so different from what they were at the commencement of Her Majesty's reign, that if any man, who died half a century ago could revisit the earth, he would find himself practically in a new world, bewildered by the presence of a variety of things which to him would be devoid of meaning; but the difference produced by the resources of modern civilization is even more perceptible in the lower than in the higher ranks. By the marvellous facility and consequent cheapness of production, with the ever-increasing multitude of products, the artisan of the present day finds himself in possession of comforts and even luxuries which princes of past generations had no conception of. The whole course of modern legislation, too, has a similar tendency. Laws are no longer made for the benefit of a few, but for the general well-being of the people. Men high in social rank, possessors of noble names and exalted positions, have made it the business and the joy of their lives to alleviate the distresses of those around them, and to elevate them in the scale of humanity. How much of this may be owing to the gracious example of the present occupant of the throne, and of her noble and devoted husband, the late lamented Prince Consort, Albert the Good, it is difficult to estimate; certain it is that Her Majesty has ever shown the warmest interest in all that concerns the happiness of her subjects, and that much of the attachment felt for her personally, and for the Royalty of which she is the representative, undoubtedly proceeds from her sympathy with suffering, her appreciation of excellence, and the manner in which she identifies herself with those over whom she rules. These are qualities which can be understood and admired by millions on whom dignified deportment, mental accomplishment, and skill in state-craft could make no impression; and they do more than armed battalions to support the throne from which they emanate.

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