INTRODUCTION

IN ancient and modern Syria—that land of historic and sacred memories—the name of "lady" is unknown, and is only expressed by the term "a virtuous woman"; and yet what truer and nobler definition can be given, for, as Solomon tells us, a virtuous woman "is far above rubies."

And so, from time to time, on our little world-stage there enters, one by one, some representative living personality to play her part in the great life-drama.

It is the old, the ever new, parable of the talents over again,—"to whom much is given, of him shall much be required;" and yet how various are the gifts, how diversified and unequal the *rôle*, the *répertoire*!

Rich indeed is our record in the Victorian era, when our crowned Lady leads the van,—when a saintly Elizabeth Fry trod the murky purlieus of Newgate, and raised fallen and degraded womankind by her angel message of pity and love. And not far behind her moved that dear "Lady with the Lamp," revered and beloved by every English

heart—Florence Nightingale; and following them a noble little band of workers.

And it is the parable again—the many, the few. Not all are called to be pioneers, or to go down into the heat of the battle. There are some that must watch beside the tents, faithful in little, faithful in much; and yet we may believe that their recording angels have written their names in letters of gold.

"Write me as one who loves his fellow-men," said Abu Ben Adhem; and surely it might be written of the leal-hearted Scotch lassie who manned the lifeboat when the ship was sinking, or of Agnes Weston working year after year amongst her beloved blue-jackets; and so on with each one of our notable good women. "There is none good," said the Master; but the term is only used here in a relative sense, to express the idea of those who have discharged their duty, redeemed their pledge, fought the good fight, and kept in the right path, —true-hearted and virtuous women in the noble Syriac sense, which is far nobler than the old Saxon definition of lady—"*hlâfweardige*"—bread-keeper.

There are some of us who think there is too little reticence and reserve at the present day, too much publicity,—as though one lived with open doors, in Japanese fashion. There is nothing kept sacred; everywhere there is the beat of drums, the flourish of trumpets; from the favoured housetops a herald seems perpetually crying, "Oyez ! good people, this

is to give notice!" and so on. And through the length and breadth of the land it passes, from mouth to mouth, spreads like wildfire—tittle-tattle, canard, topic of the day—interviewer and journalist all are tiptoe and agog for the latest tit-bit; and Mercury wears his fool's cap and bells, and has a suit of motley.

This, too, is true, and cannot be repudiated; but notwithstanding, there is one saving clause in this document of human infatuation—the strength and power of example, the light that shines from the unhidden candlestick—and this we must not deny. There is no such anomaly in nature as isolated good deeds; one might as well throw stones into a pond and expect no eddies or circles, as believe that good works may be done without influencing that generation. If "their works do follow the blessed dead" into the unseen life, most assuredly their potency and force are wide-spreading here, and the circles overlap each other and widen out, as they do on the watery bosom of the stream.

So, as men place finger-posts where intersecting roads meet, to point the way clearly, may these sketches of twelve noble and useful lives be read and studied by the women of this generation, and "go and do thou likewise" be written upon some true heart.

Her Majesty the Queen

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

CHAPTER I

VICTORIA THE GOOD

"Time in his mantle's sunniest fold
Uplifted in his arms the child;
And, while the fearless infant smiled,
Her happy destiny foretold.
Infancy, by wisdom mild,
Framed to health and artless beauty;
Youth by pleasure unbeguiled
From the path of lofty duty.
Womanhood in pure renown
Seated on her lineal throne."

ODE BY WORDSWORTH.

THERE was a striking sentence written some twelve years ago by Dr. Macaulay, to this effect:—

"When the time comes for the history of the reign of Queen Victoria to be written, it will be found that no equal epoch since the commencement of the Christian era—except, perhaps, that which includes the discovery of America, the invention of printing, and the Reformation—has been so full of important events, affecting the condition and progress of the human race. . . . In the advancement of science," he goes on to say, "and its application to the arts; in the subjugation of nature to the use of man; all around us and in our daily life, we see the results of

material progress. Nor is the advance less marked in social and moral, in educational and religious life."

"In Queen Victoria," said Lord Macaulay, "her subjects have found a wiser, gentler, happier Elizabeth"—and this, too, is pregnant with truth. The whole life of our beloved Queen, as we know it up to the present day, is a Royal Idyll, noble in its simplicity, its truth, its purity; and as child, crowned maiden, wife, mother, and widowed ruler, she alike claims our reverence and love.

It was a blessed day for England, that 24th of May, 1819, when in the grey old palace at Kensington the girl baby opened her blue eyes first on this world. The only child of the popular Duke of Kent and his wife, the widowed and charming Princess of Leiningen, great was her father's rejoicing at her birth. "Take care of her, for she will be Queen of England," he would say, with fond pride; and so the little Princess was baptised on the 24th of June, in the grand saloon of Kensington Palace, and received the name of Alexandrina Victoria; and it is interesting to read that she was successfully vaccinated the following August, and that she was "the first member of the Royal Family of Britain who received the benefit of Jenner's remarkable discovery." There is a happy little account of their stay at Sidmouth, where the little one thrived in the health-giving Devonshire air; but alas! the visit terminated sadly. The Duke was seized with a severe indisposition and chill, which resulted in inflammation of the chest with high fever; and before the babe was nine months old she was fatherless. Two days later the widowed Duchess, with her child and her brother Prince Leopold, set out for London.

There is a sweet word-picture here; for we are told that the royal infant, "being held up at the carriage window to bid the assembled population of Sidmouth farewell, sported and laughed joyously, and patted the glass with her pretty dimpled hands, in happy unconsciousness of her

melancholy bereavement." The graphic little scene seems to live for us: the crowing babe, the tiny hands beating in infantile fashion against the shining pane, the gurgling laughter of the unconscious little one; while the widowed mother wept beside her,—how vividly one seems to see it!

As we follow the footsteps of the Royal child from infancy to childhood, and on through her early youth, the curtain seems to rise for us again and again; and some never-to-be-forgotten picture is placed before our eyes—distinct, lifelike, rich with nature's verity, and warm with colour.

Every writer who has striven to pourtray the leading incidents of Queen Victoria's life has seized eagerly on these little episodes, which seem to stand out with cameo-like clearness, and one by one to reproduce them.

There was something grand and unique in the self-abnegation of the widowed Duchess of Kent when she determined to devote her life to the care and training of her fatherless child.

In her own noble words she says: "We stood alone—almost friendless and alone in this country; I could not even speak the language of it. I did not hesitate how to act; I gave up my home, my kindred, my duties [the regency of Leiningen] to devote myself to that duty which is to be the whole object of my life."

And from that time she lived at Kensington in strict seclusion; and from the day of her father's death until she ascended the throne the Princess always slept in her mother's room.

There is another infantile sketch that is very charming,—when we hear of the little Princess appearing in her phaeton, when she was fifteen months old, tied safely to the vehicle with a broad ribbon, and drawn by her half-sister Princess Feodore.

And we are told too that "the baby liked to be noticed, and answered all who spoke to her; she would say 'lady,'

and 'good morning,' and when told, would hold out her soft dimpled hand to be kissed, with an arch expression on her face. . . . Her large blue eyes, beautiful bloom, and fair complexion made her a model of infantine beauty."

The great philanthropist William Wilberforce writes to Hannah More, on July 21st, 1820: "In consequence of a civil message from the Duchess of Kent I waited on her this morning. She received me with her fine animated child on the floor beside her with her playthings, of which I soon became one." The life at Kensington Palace was as simple as that of any English household.

Mr. Charles Knight, the publisher, has left a pleasing record of this period of the Queen's life. "I delighted," he narrates, "to walk in Kensington Gardens sometimes on a holiday afternoon with my elder girls, more frequently in the early morning on my way to town. In such a season, when the sun was hardly high enough to have dried up the dews of Kensington green alleys, as I passed along the broad central walk I saw a group on the lawn before the Palace, which to my mind was a vision of exquisite loveliness. The Duchess of Kent and her daughter, whose age then numbered nine, were breakfasting in the open air, a single page attending on them at a respectful distance, the matron looking on with eyes of love, while the fair soft face is bright with smiles." And farther on he exclaims with enthusiasm, "What a beautiful characteristic it seems to me of the training of this Royal girl, that she should not have been taught to shrink from the public eye; that she should enjoy the freedom and simplicity of a child's nature; that she should not be restrained when she starts up from the breakfast table and runs to gather a flower in the adjoining pasture; and that her merry laugh should be as fearless as the notes of the thrushes around ! I passed on and blessed her; and thank God I have lived to see the golden fruits of such training."

Nothing could exceed the almost severe simplicity of that Royal household. One record by a contemporary informs us of the daily routine.

"The family party met at breakfast at eight o'clock in summer time, the Princess Victoria having her bread and milk, and fruit, put on a little table by her mother's side. After breakfast the Princess Feodore studied with her governess, Baroness Lehzen, and the Princess Victoria went out for an hour's walk or drive. From ten to twelve her mother instructed her, and then she would amuse herself by running through the suite of rooms which extended round two sides of the Palace, and in which were many of her toys. Her nurse was a Mrs. Brock, whom the Princess used to call her 'dear dear Boppy.' At two came a plain dinner, while the Duchess took her luncheon. After this, lessons again until four; then would come a visit or a drive, and after that the Princess would ride or walk in the gardens; or occasionally, on very fine evenings, the whole party would sit out on the lawn under the trees. At the time of her mother's dinner the Princess had her supper laid at her side; then after playing with her nurse she would join them at dessert, and at nine she would retire to her bed which was placed beside her mother's, day and night watched over by maternal love.

Claremont, the residence of Prince Leopold, was a second home to the Duchess and her children, as the Royal pen has noted with reference to these visits. These were the happiest days of the Queen's childhood. The little Princess adored her uncle; and in 1842, when the Queen was staying at Claremont, she wrote to him in very touching words. "This place brings back recollections of the happiest days of my otherwise dull childhood; days when I experienced such kindness from you, dearest uncle; Victoria plays with my old bricks, and I see her running and jumping in the