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Queen Victoria was the reigning monarch of England for sixty-three years, from 1838 until 1901. Born Alexandrina Victoria to the Duchess of Kent, she was not expected to be queen, as she was the child of the fourth son of George III. She was coronated on June 28th, 1838 and immediately began testing her new-found power by moving her mother, who had sheltered Victoria for most of her childhood, to rooms far away from her own. She married her cousin, Prince Albert, and they had nine children together (Williams). Until Queen Elizabeth II, the current queen, Queen Victoria was the longest reigning monarch in England’s history.

*I climbed into the gleaming carriage in all my finery. While the ermine mantle was soft against my cheek, it was also stifling in the June humidity. I prayed I would not sweat, as it would surely show up against the red satin of my gown.* Only a few hours*, I told myself. The second half of the five-hour ceremony would be spent in a linen sheath and a brilliant gold tunic.* That *was the outfit I was looking forward to. It would be far more comfortable than this twenty-pound monstrosity.*

*My coronation day was going as planned. I would ride to Westminster Abbey, wear my state robes during the procession through the church, change into my shift to receive my crown and swear my oaths, allow the peers of the realm to approach and kiss my ring, and then I could relax at the banquet and enjoy the fireworks Lord Melbourne promised. I spent a week studying the ceremony. I was* not *about to make a mistake and prove to all those old, doddering fools that I was too young to be queen. I* would *do this properly and with the regal grace of all the kings and queens before me.*

*The carriage pulled up to the church. I could hear the trumpets playing the fanfare that would announce my arrival and follow me down the aisle. I barely remembered stepping out of the carriage and gliding into the church – I was in a daze, blinded by the red and gold decorations and the crowds around the church yelling, “Long live Queen Victoria”*

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*In front of the Archbishop of Canterbury, now in my linen shift, I prepared myself to be crowned.* Deep breaths*, I thought, trying to reassure myself. I glanced to my left – Lord Melbourne gave me a confident smile, tears of pride glistening in his eyes. Seeing his face, almost fatherly in affection, gave me a surge of confidence. I turned back to the Archbishop as he handed me the royal orb and scepter, their coolness in contrast to my sweaty palms. I squared my shoulders and straightened my spine, anticipating the weight of the crown - the weight of a realm. The rubies and sapphires glistened as I turned to face my countrymen. I took a deep breath, stared straight ahead, and lifted my chin as a roar of “God save the queen!” filled my ears.*

Throughout her time on the throne, Queen Victoria influenced many aspects of British culture and government, but her main impact was on the public’s perception of the monarchy. Because England was ruled through Parliament, many people questioned why the monarchy (who often spent a lot of money) was necessary. According to Kate Williams, a royal historian, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert wanted to show the people that they were prepared to “earn their keep.” They both took an interest in charities and local institutions (Williams). This proved to the public that the monarchy’s money was being used for the good of the country instead of extravagant parties. This tradition continues today. The current royal family serves as patrons for many charities. The royal family’s official website lists hundreds of “charities and patronages” which members of the royal family are associated with, including Action for Children, The Assocation of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland, and The Association for Science Education (“Charities and Patronages”). Without Queen Victoria’s interest in charity work, the English monarchy most likely wouldn’t exist as it does today

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