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Edited by George Earle Buckle

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The Letters of Queen Victoria

This nine-volume selection from the letters of Queen Victoria, with ancillary material, was commissioned by her son, Edward VII, and published between 1907 and 1932, with a gap of almost twenty years between the third and fourth volumes. The editor of the 'Third Series', which covers the years from 1886 to 1901, was George Earle Buckle (1854–1935), a historian and former editor of *The Times*, who continued the editorial policy of his predecessors, but who needed to tread carefully, as many of the people mentioned in documents of the final part of Queen Victoria's reign were still alive when Volumes 7–9 were published between 1930 and 1932. The final volume covers the period from 1896 to the Queen-Empress' death in January 1901. The Boer war is a dominating topic, and the final letter from the Queen is a message of gratitude to her troops in South Africa.

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VOLUME 9: 1896–1901

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THE
LETTERS OF QUEEN VICTORIA
THIRD SERIES
VOL. III

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H. M. Queen Victoria
1899

From a picture by Von Angeli in Windsor Castle

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THE LETTERS OF QUEEN VICTORIA

THIRD SERIES

A SELECTION FROM HER MAJESTY'S
CORRESPONDENCE AND JOURNAL BETWEEN
THE YEARS 1886 AND 1901

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY OF
HIS MAJESTY THE KING

EDITED BY GEORGE EARLE BUCKLE
EDITOR OF THE SECOND SERIES

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. III
1896–1901

LONDON
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PREFACE

THIS volume brings *The Letters of Queen Victoria* to a close. The enterprise which King Edward started and King George has carried through is now complete. In nine substantial volumes—three series of three volumes each—there lies open for the public and posterity a continuous presentation of the great Queen, in her correspondence and journal, from even before her accession in June 1837 down to her death in January 1901. Here, extracted from the Windsor Archives, are materials of absolute authenticity and trustworthiness for the reign and the personality of the most beloved, and one of the most renowned, of the long line of English monarchs.

In one respect the two latter series, covering the years 1862–1901, for which the present Editor is responsible, are more informative about her Majesty's character and capacity than the first series. During the Prince Consort's life, the absolute confidence which the Queen before long came to repose in her husband's judgment makes it often difficult to distinguish her action and sentiments from his. After his death, though no widow ever endeavoured more faithfully to carry out unaltered the policy and views of the departed, a gradual emancipation from

his influence was inevitable. No other single influence took its place. After her Majesty's children had grown to manhood and womanhood, she took counsel with several of them, now and again, mainly on special subjects; towards the close of her reign, more and more with the Prince of Wales. She placed considerable reliance on her successive Private Secretaries, General Grey, Sir Henry Ponsonby, and Sir Arthur Bigge—especially on Sir Henry Ponsonby, who held the post for a quarter of a century. Among her Ministers there were two in whom she had great confidence, one after the other, Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Salisbury. But she had serious differences with both; and with both, on occasion after occasion, she ultimately carried her point. Thus no Prince or Princess, no Secretary or Minister, became a dominating influence. While, in contemplating her married life, we may wonder whether it is not the Prince Consort (rather than the Queen herself) who is speaking through the Queen's mouth or writing by the Queen's pen, we feel, when we come to the latter half of the reign, that we are hearing or reading her Majesty's authentic utterance. The habits and the way of life persisted, and the memories of the past were carefully cherished, but the independence of thought and the individuality of character are unmistakable. These qualities shone out conspicuously in the Queen's action and correspondence during the Boer War in her last year of life; indeed, such were her force of character and devotion to duty that, in face of increasing physical weakness, she carried on her constitutional functions to within a few days of the end.

The Editor may perhaps be allowed to repeat here, and adopt as his own, the appropriate words with which in 1907 his predecessors, Dr. Arthur Benson

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and the 2nd Lord Esher, concluded their original preface to *The Letters of Queen Victoria* :

It is a deeply inspiring spectacle to see one surrounded by every temptation which worldly greatness can present, living from day to day so simple, vivid, and laborious a life ; and it is impossible to conceive a more fruitful example of duty and affection and energy, displayed on so august a scale, and in the midst of such magnificent surroundings. We would venture to believe that nothing could so deepen the personal devotion of the Empire to the memory of that great Queen who ruled it so wisely and so long, and its deeply-rooted attachment to the principle of constitutional monarchy, as the gracious act of his Majesty the King in allowing the inner side of that noble life and career to be more clearly revealed to a nation whose devotion to their ancient liberties is inseparably connected with their loyalty to the Throne.

EDITORIAL NOTE

THE genealogical table of Queen Victoria's descendants, which was appended to the third volume of the Original Series, has been brought up to date and reproduced at the end of this volume. To meet the convenience of readers, it gives the pet names in use in the Royal Family—names which so frequently recur in her Majesty's journal and letters.

The Editor's obligations to those who have given him friendly and valuable help in preparing the Third Series for the press have already been acknowledged in detail in the previous volumes. He can only reiterate, on this final occasion, his warm gratitude to all : to the King's Private Secretary, to the guardians of the Windsor Archives, and to the Publishers.

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