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Villette, Charlotte BRONTË (1853); ch 20, The Modern Library New York edition (2001), pp 247-249

And now all was prepared: but one compartment of the hall waited to be filled—a compartment covered with crimson, like the grand staircase and doors, furnished with stuffed and cushioned benches, ranged on each side of two regal chairs, placed solemnly under a canopy.

5 A signal was given, the doors rolled back, the assembly stood up, the orchestra burst out, and, to the welcome of a choral burst, enter the King, the Queen, the Court of Labassecour.

10 Till then, I had never set eyes on living king or queen; it may consequently be conjectured how I strained my powers of vision to take in these specimens of European royalty. By whomsoever majesty is beheld for the first time, there will always be experienced a vague surprise bordering on disappointment, that the same does not appear seated, en permanence, on a throne, bonneted with a crown, and furnished, as to the hand, with a sceptre. Looking out for a king and queen, and seeing only a middle-aged soldier and a rather young lady, I felt half cheated, half pleased.

15 Well do I recall that King - a man of fifty, a little bowed, a little gray: there was no face in all that assembly which resembled his. I had never read, never been told anything of his nature or his habits; and at first the strong hieroglyphics graven as with iron stilet on his brow, round his eyes, beside his mouth, puzzled and baffled instinct. Ere long, however, if I did not *know*, at least I *felt*, the meaning of those characters written without hand. There sat a silent sufferer—a nervous, melancholy man. Those eyes had looked on the visits of a certain ghost—had long waited the comings and goings of that strangest spectre, Hypochondria. Perhaps he saw her now on that stage, over against him, amidst all that brilliant throng. Hypochondria has that wont, to rise in the midst of thousands—dark as Doom, pale as Malady, and well-nigh strong as Death. Her comrade and victim thinks to be happy one moment—'Not so,' says she; 'I come'. And she freezes the blood in his heart, and beclouds the light in his eye.

25 Some might say it was the foreign crown pressing the King's brows which bent them to that peculiar and painful fold; some might quote the effects of early bereavement. Something there might be of both these; but these as embittered by that darkest foe of humanity—constitutional melancholy. The Queen, his wife, knew this: it seemed to me, the reflection of her husband's grief lay, a subduing shadow, on her own benignant face. A mild, thoughtful, graceful woman that princess seemed; not beautiful, not at all like the women of solid charms and marble feelings described a page or two since. Hers was a somewhat slender shape; her features, though distinguished enough, were too suggestive of reigning dynasties and royal lines to give unqualified pleasure. The expression clothing that profile was agreeable in the present instance; but you could not avoid connecting it with remembered effigies, where similar lines appeared, under phase ignoble; feeble, or sensual, or cunning, as the case might be. The Queen's eye, however, was her own; and pity, goodness, sweet sympathy, blessed it with divinest

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35 light. She moved no sovereign, but a lady—kind, loving, elegant. Her little son, the Prince of
Labassecour, a young Duc de Dindonneau, accompanied her: he leaned on his mother's knee; and, ever
and anon, in the course of that evening, I saw her observant of the monarch at her side, conscious of
his beclouded abstraction, and desirous to rouse him from it by drawing his attention to their son. She
often bent her head to listen to the boy's remarks, and would then smilingly repeat them to his sire.
40 The moody King started, listened, smiled, but invariably relapsed as soon as his good angel ceased
speaking. Full mournful and significant was that spectacle! Not the less so because, both for the
aristocracy and the honest bourgeoisie of Labassecour, its peculiarity seemed to be wholly invisible: I
could not discover that one soul present was either struck or touched.

45 With the King and Queen had entered their court, comprising two or three foreign
ambassadors; and with them came the élite of the foreigners then resident in Villette. These took
possession of the crimson benches; the ladies were seated; most of the men remained standing: their
sable rank, lining the background, looked like a dark foil to the splendour displayed in front. Nor was
this splendour without varying light and shade and gradation: the middle distance was filled with
matrons in velvets and satins, in plumes and gems; the benches in the foreground, to the Queen's right
50 hand, seemed devoted exclusively to young girls, the flower—perhaps, I should rather say, the bud—of
Villette aristocracy. Here were no jewels, no head-dresses, no velvet pile or silken sheen: purity,
simplicity, and aërial grace reigned in that virgin band. Young heads simply braided, and fair forms—I
was going to write *sylph* forms, but that would have been quite untrue: several of these 'jeunes filles,'
who had not numbered more than sixteen or seventeen years, boasted contours as robust and solid as
55 those of a stout Englishwoman of five-and-twenty—robed in white, or pale rose, or placid blue,
suggested thoughts of heaven and angels. I knew a couple, at least, of these 'rose et blanches'
specimens of humanity. Here was a pair of Madame Beck's late pupils—Mesdemoiselles Mathilde and
Angelique: pupils, who, during their last year at school, ought to have been in the first class, but whose
brains never got them beyond the second division. In English, they had been under my own charge,
60 and hard work it was to get them to translate rationally a page of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Also during
three months I had one of them for my vis-à-vis at table, and the quantity of household bread, butter,
and stewed fruit she would habitually consume at 'second déjeuner' was a real world's wonder—to be
exceeded only by the fact of her actually pocketing slices she could not eat. Here be
truths—wholesome truths, too.

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DOCUMENT B

Letters : a selection from Her Majesty's correspondence between the years 1837 and 1861; published by authority of His Majesty the King; By Victoria, Queen of Great Britain, 1819-1901; Edited by A. C. Benson & Viscount Esher; Volume I; published 1907

Source: https://archive.org/stream/lettersselection01victuoft/lettersselection01victuoft_djvu.txt

Queen Victoria to the King of the Belgians.

BELVOIR CASTLE, 4th December 1843.

5 MY DEAREST UNCLE, Being much hurried, I can only write you a few
lines to thank you for your kind letter of the 29th, received this morning. You
will have heard from Louise the account of our stay at Drayton (which is a
very nice house), and of Albert's brilliant reception at Birmingham. We
arrived at Chatsworth on Friday, and left it at nine this morning, quite
10 charmed and delighted with everything there. Splendour and comfort are so
admirably combined, and the Duke does everything so well. [...] We arrived
here at half-past two, we perform our journey so delightfully on the railroad,
so quickly and easily. It puts me in mind of our dear stay in Belgium, when
we stop at the various stations.

Albert is going out hunting to-morrow, which I wish was *over*, but I am
assured that the country is much better than the Windsor country.

15 The Duc de Bordeaux's proceedings in London are most highly improper.
The Queen Dowager is also here.

We leave this place on Thursday for home, which, I own, I shall be glad of
at last. Ever your devoted Niece,

VICTORIA R.

20 *The Princess Hohenlohe to Queen Victoria.*

LANGENBURG, 10th December 1843.

25 My DEAREST VICTORIA,—...You ask in your letter about the manner in
which my children say their prayers ? They say it when in their beds, but not
kneeling; how absurd to find *that* necessary, as if it could have anything to do
with making our prayers more acceptable to the Almighty or more holy. How
really clever people can have those notions I don't understand. I am sorry it is
the case there, where there is so much good and, I am certain, real piety. Dear
Pussy learning her letters I should like to see and hear; I am sure she will
learn them very quick.

30 Has Bertie not learned some more words and sentences during your absence?

....

Your attached and devoted sister,

FEODORA.

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Queen Victoria to the King of the Belgians.

WINDSOR CASTLE, 12th December 1843.

35 MY DEAREST UNCLE,— I thank you much for your kind letter of the
7th, which I received as usual on Sunday. Louise will be able to tell you how
well the remainder of our journey went off, and *how* well Albert's hunting
answered. One can hardly credit the absurdity of people here, but Albert's
40 riding so boldly and hard has made such a sensation that it has been written
all over the country, and they make much more of it than if he had done some
great act!

It rather disgusts one, but still it had done, and does, good, for it has put
an end to all impertinent sneering for the future about Albert's riding. This
journey has done great good, and my beloved Angel in particular has had *the*
45 *greatest success* ; for instance, at Birmingham the good his visit has done has
been immense, for Albert spoke to all these manufacturers *in their own*
language, which they did not expect, and these poor people have only been
accustomed to hear demagogues and Chartists.

We cannot understand how you can think the country about Chatsworth
50 *not* pretty, for it is (with the exception of the moors) beautiful, wooded hills
and valleys and rapid streams. The country round Belvoir I do not admire,
but the view from the castle is very fine and extensive, and Albert says puts
him so in mind of the Kalenberg. . . .

Pray have you heard anything about Aumale's plans ? Dear little Gaston
55 seems much better.

The Duc de Bordeaux has been informed of my and the Government's
extreme displeasure at their conduct ; they say there shall be no more such
displays. He was to leave London yesterday, only to return again for a day,
and then to leave England altogether.

60 With Albert's love, ever, dearest Uncle, your most devoted Niece,

VICTORIA R

The King of the Belgians to Queen Victoria.

LAEKEN, 15th December 1843.

65 MY DEAREST VICTORIA,— I am most happy to see that your journey
passed so well, and trust you are not sorry to be again in your very dear and
comfortable home, and with your dear children. People are very strange, and
their great delight is to find fault with their fellow-creatures; what harm
could it have done them if Albert had *not* hunted at all? and still I have no
doubt that his having hunted well and boldly has given more satisfaction than
70 if he had done Heaven knows what praiseworthy deed ; *ainsi est et sera le*
monde.

I am glad also that the Birmingham course succeeded so well ; the theme
had been for some years, particularly amongst manufacturers, that Royalty
was useless and ignorant, and that the greatest blessing would be, to
75 manufacture beyond measure, and to have an American form of Government,
with an elective head of State.

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80 Fortunately, there has always hitherto been in England a very aristocratic
feeling freely accepted by the people, who like it, and show that they like it.
... I was much amused, some time ago, by a very rich and influential
American from New York assuring me that they stood in great need of a
Government which was able to grant protection to property, and that the
feeling of many was for Monarchy instead of the misrule of mobs, as they
had it, and that he wished very much *some branch of the Coburg family*
85 *might be disposable* for such a place. *Qu'en dites vous*, is not this flattering? .

..
There is nothing very remarkable going on, besides I mean to write again
on some subjects. Give my best love to Albert, and Pussy, who may
remember me perhaps, and I remain, ever, my beloved Victoria, your devoted
Uncle,
LEOPOLD R.

DOCUMENT C

The execution of King Charles I; National Portrait Gallery, London
Unknown artist; line engraving, circa 1649 (116 mm x 134 mm)

