



The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection From Her Majesty's Correspondence Between the Years 1837 and 1861 (Complete)

Queen of Great Britain Victoria

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Entrusted by His Majesty the King with the duty of making a selection from Queen Victoria's correspondence, we think it well to describe briefly the nature of the documents which we have been privileged to examine, as well as to indicate the principles which have guided us throughout. It has been a task of no ordinary difficulty. Her Majesty Queen Victoria dealt with her papers, from the first, in a most methodical manner; she formed the habit in early days of preserving her private letters, and after her accession to the Throne all her official papers were similarly treated, and bound in volumes. The Prince Consort instituted an elaborate system of classification, annotating and even indexing many of the documents with his own hand. The result is that the collected papers form what is probably the most extraordinary series of State documents in the world. The papers which deal with the Queen's life up to the year 1861 have been bound in chronological order, and comprise between five and six hundred volumes. They consist, in great part, of letters from Ministers detailing the proceedings of Parliament, and of various political memoranda dealing with home, foreign, and colonial policy; among these are a few drafts of Her Majesty's replies. There are volumes concerned with the affairs of almost every European country; with the history of India, the British Army, the Civil List, the Royal Estates, and all the complicated machinery of the Monarchy and the Constitution. There are letters from monarchs and royal personages, and there is further a whole series of volumes dealing with matters in which the Prince Consort took a special interest. Some of them are arranged chronologically, some by subjects. Among the most interesting volumes are those containing the letters written by Her Majesty to her uncle Leopold, King of the Belgians, and his replies.¹ The collection of letters from and to Lord Melbourne forms another hardly less interesting series. In many places Queen Victoria caused extracts, copied from her own private Diaries, dealing with important political events or describing momentous interviews, to be inserted in the volumes, with the evident intention of illustrating and completing the record. Footnote 1: A set of volumes containing the Queen's letters to Lord John Russell came into our hands too late to be made use of for the present publication. It became obvious at once that it was impossible to deal with these papers exhaustively. They would provide material for a historical series extending to several hundred volumes. Moreover, on the other hand, there are many gaps, as a great deal of the business of State was transacted by interviews of which no official record is preserved

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