

Strachey's Portrait Of Queen Victoria

Posted on October 22, 2019

Introduction

Lytton Strachey was a prominent member of the famous literary and artistic circle run by the cultural elite, the Bloomsbury Group. He was a biographer and an essayist, and he made his mark with the publication of *Eminent Victorians*, which consists of the portraits of the most famous figures of early twentieth-century England. The “*Eminent Victorians*” was published in 1918, while the *Illustrated Queen Victoria* was published in 192. The present essay intends to evaluate that although Strachey made a mockery of the public adulation of Queen Victoria, nonetheless, he fell under the spell of her “vitality, conscientiousness, pride, and simplicity.”

Discussion

The book follows the traditional form of the biography, starting from “antecedent” to “old age” and then finally her death. The book consists of ten chapters covering the major events of her life and achievements in a tone of irony and sly humor in the beginning, with a shift in tone by the end of the book. According to Strachey, all of her life, Queen Victoria wanted someone she could lean upon, a very psychological trait identified by Strachey. Her relationship with Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli is told accurately, including the absurd nature of the event. He depicts Victoria as her fault, and, most importantly, he tries to understand her through her relationships with other people. Finally, he expresses his deep fascination for her in the penultimate chapter of the book (Joyce, 2007).

Strachey, when it came to summing up her achievements, argues that although Victoria's age made remarkable advancements in science and industry, nevertheless, it left monarchy “perfectly cold,” as the lines state:

“The amazing scientific movement, which Albert had appreciated no less, left Victoria perfectly cold. Her conception of the universe, and of man's place in it, and of the stupendous problems of nature and philosophy remained, throughout her life, entirely unchanged.” (Strachey, 258)

Her religious orthodoxy and the astonishing problems of philosophy and man's position in the universe remained “unchanged.” And finally, Strachey claims that at the end of her reign, the Crown was weaker than any other period in the history of England. Strachey goes on to discuss her life in a more general fashion, and the tone of irony and sarcasm changes into a more general conception of her character. In recent times, publications, dramatizations, and exhibitions have retained their interest in Victorian art. In the last chapters of the book, Strachey's fascination with the queen increases, as we will see shortly. Strachey seems to be bewildered by the sheer “irresistible sincerity”

of his subject apart from the mockery of her public figure among the masses. In chapter nine, part three, Strachey expresses her profound yearning for India and Indian mysticism, which is at odds with her age and times. The following line perfectly captures his beguilement with his subject:

"The thought of India fascinated her; she set to, and learned a little Hindustani; she engaged some Indian servants, who became her inseparable attendants, and one of whom, Munshi Abdul Karim, eventually almost succeeded to the position which had once been John Brown's." (Strachey, 258)

The lines clearly state the Queen's interest in mysticism and Strachey's fascination with the Queen. Furthermore, Strachey goes on to get insightful and fundamental traits of the Queen in the following passages where he admires Queen Victoria not as the Queen of England but as an individual, these chapters of the book specifically focus on the Victoria figure, not the Queen Victoria's one. Therefore, Strachey's irony and sarcasm turn into admiration and an authentic view of the life of the most famous and admired figure in the history of England. As the lines state:

"Duty, conscience, morality — yes! In the light of those high beacons the Queen had always lived. She had passed her days in work and not in pleasure — in public responsibilities and family cares." (Strachey, 262)

The lines clearly indicate the shift from a public to a more personal view of the figure and, most of all, the real and honest depiction of her character from all possible dimensions. Strachey argues that the most interesting and amazing thing about Queen Victoria was her sincerity, and *"her truthfulness, her single-mindedness, the vividness of her emotions and her unrestrained expression of them, were the varied forms which this central characteristic assumed"* (Strachey, 262). Hence, the central theme of the book was not to satirize the subject but to give as honest and as authentic an account of one's life and personality as possible (Muzzey, 1922). The textual evidence given above evidently suggests the author's unbiasedness as we carefully analyze the tone and texture of the passages from the book. The ending passage of the book further illuminates his fascination for the queen not merely for her truthfulness and her compassion for her family and her people but also for being a Queen, as the lines state exquisitely:

"The little old lady, with her white hair and her plain mourning clothes, in her wheeled chair or her donkey carriage — one saw her so; and then — close behind — with their immediate suggestion of singularity, of mystery, and of power — the Indian servants." (Strachey, 266)

Conclusion

Strachey's portrait of Queen Victoria is an honest and real depiction of the lady's life, not merely as a political figure but as an individual, as a wife, as a girl, and finally, as the queen of the people, not only the people of England but also the people of India and her deep affection for Indian culture signifies her perspectival personality.

Works Cited

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Muzzey, David S. "Queen Victoria." (1922): 122-125.

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