

August 2020

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Recommended Citation

Kollander, Patricia (2020). Empress Frederick and the Women's Movement in Nineteenth-Century Germany. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21(6), 321-331.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol21/iss6/20>

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Empress Frederick and the Women's Movement in Nineteenth-Century Germany

By Patricia Kollander¹

Abstract

Empress Frederick of Germany (1841-1901) is known first and foremost as the liberal consort of Emperor Frederick, who died after a reign of only 99 days in 1888. A vast majority of her biographers believe that she converted her husband into a supporter of British-style liberalism, and that his premature death effectively ended prospects for liberal development in Germany. Yet historians have consistently overlooked her work to advance women's causes, which left a far more tangible legacy than her involvement in politics. The essay discusses reasons why she embraced women's causes and attempts to reassess her legacy. It also invites a critique of how political and social historians have viewed her accomplishments.

Keywords: Empress Frederick of Germany (1841-1901), Women's education, Feminism in nineteenth century Germany

Introduction

In early 1902, five months after the death of Empress Frederick of Germany from cancer, an article in London's *Charity Organisation Review* proposed the establishment of an endowment in her name for cancer patients in the New Hospital for Women. The endowment was to be established for "the keen interest taken by the Empress Frederick in the welfare and advancement of women."²

This is not how she has been remembered. Most of her biographers see her as the empress who was deprived of the opportunity to instill liberal reforms in Germany due to the untimely death of her husband, Emperor Frederick III, after a reign of only 99 days.³ A distinct

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² "We understand that it is proposed to endow a bed for a patient suffering from cancer in a woman's hospital, and to name the endowed bed after the Emperor and Empress Frederick. Regard being had to the keen interest taken by the Empress Frederick in the welfare and advancement of women, it is further proposed to locate the Memorial Bed in the New Hospital for Women, Euston Road. "Proposed Memorial in London to the Emperor and Empress Frederick." *Charity Organisation Review*, New Series, Vol. 11, No. 62 (FEBRUARY 1902), p. 112. Published by: Oxford University Press. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43787563>.

³ Older biographies of Victoria include Egon Caesar Conte Corti, *The English Empress. A Study in the Relations between Queen Victoria and Her Eldest Daughter*, Empress Frederick of Germany (London, 1957), Richard Barkeley, *the Empress Frederick* (London, 1956), Daphne Bennett, *Vicky: Princess Royal of England and German Empress* (London, 1971). More recent works include Hanna Pakula, *An Uncommon Woman. The Empress Frederick* (New York, 1995), and John van der Kiste, *Dearest Vicky, Darling Fritz. The Tragic Love Story of Queen Victoria's Eldest Daughter and the German Emperor*. (Gloucestershire, 2001). Patricia Kollander, "Empress Frederick: The Last Hope for a Liberal Germany?" *The Historian* Vol. 62 No.1 (Fall 1999) pp. 47-63.

minority accuse her of stunting the emotional development of her son, the future Emperor William II, whose disastrous reign helped pave the way towards Imperial Germany's involvement in World War I.⁴ It is important to point out, however, that these conclusions were based on commentaries of leading male politicians of her time who attached no significance to her work on behalf of women. In other words, because most of Victoria's biographers focused on her missed opportunity to change the tenor of German politics, they overlooked what she actually accomplished for women during her lifetime, along with the legacy of those accomplishments.⁵ The following essay will look at reasons why she became involved in women's causes, and will attempt to place the significance of her efforts into historical context.

Beloved Daughter and Political Pawn

The future Empress of Germany was born Princess Victoria Adelaide Mary Louisa of Great Britain in November 1840; she received the title of Princess Royal a year later. She was the eldest child of Queen Victoria and her German-born consort, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and was her father's favorite. Young Victoria was regarded as highly intelligent and was tutored personally by her father. She was taught to be first and foremost a facilitator of liberal political change, not an advocate for women's causes. When his daughter was a child, Albert already had high hopes that she would eventually marry Prince Frederick of Prussia, son of the heir to the throne of Prussia, Prince William (future King of Prussia and German Emperor from 1871-88).

Albert believed that the proposed union would foster significant political changes in the land of his birth. In the mid-nineteenth century, thirty-nine German speaking states (including Austria, Prussia and his native Saxe-Coburg Gotha) were housed in the German Confederation, a loose organization of states governed by conservative monarchs and nobles. After his marriage to Queen Victoria, Albert became an ardent supporter of British-style liberalism. He believed that Britain's greatness was based on its progressive institutions, especially a ministry responsible to parliament, not the monarch (as was the case in Prussia), and wished to see similar changes in Prussia. Though he conceded that obstacles to liberal reforms were great in Prussia, he insisted that, "a new leaf has to be turned over and there must be government with the majority."⁶ By Albert's lights, if the Prussian monarchy adopted a plan of reform, it could spearhead the unification of Germany. In a September 1847 memorandum, Albert insisted that the development of forms of popular government in Germany was making rapid strides, and that "the yearning for German unity will not merely be increased, but the means will also be provided for its attainment."⁷

The politically reformed and united Germany that Albert envisaged would ultimately strengthen and protect British interests as it would be closely allied to Britain and support its

⁴ Evelyn Tisdall, *She Made the World Chaos: The Story of the Empress Frederick* (London, 1944). Patricia Kollander's *Frederick III: Germany's Liberal Emperor* (Westport, CT, 1995) is more critical of Victoria's influence than most works about her but stops short of Tisdall's condemnation of her overall legacy.

⁵ Important exceptions include an article by James C. Albisetti, "The Empress Frederick and female education in the late nineteenth century: Germany, England and Italy," (*Paedagogica Historica* 2012), 48:3, 345-355 and an essay by Margit Göttert, "Victoria und die Deutsche Frauenbewegung" in Rainer von Hessen, ed., *Victoria, Kaiserin Friedrich (1840-1901). Mission und Schicksal einer englischen Prinzessin in Deutschland.* (Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/New York, 2002), pp. 95-109.

⁶ Frank Eyck, *The Prince Consort. A Political Biography*, (London, 1959), p. 77.

⁷ Theodore Martin, *The Life of HRH The Prince Consort*, 3rd ed., (London, 1880) vol. I, pp. 439-446.

desire to block Russian or French expansion.⁸ The introduction of liberal reforms in Prussia, Germany's unification under Prussian leadership, and a fruitful Anglo-German alliance--could all be realized if Frederick, the future ruler of Prussia, could be won over to Albert's ideas through Victoria.

Albert's pronouncements on Prussia and Germany, however, were not always accurate. He overestimated the strength and scope of the liberal movement, which was confined to a small middle class and divided on key issues. Right-wing liberals recognized the value of representative institutions, but wanted to keep their influence over political affairs as limited as possible.⁹ Their opponents desired the establishment of a government on the English model, which gave parliament an influential voice in the affairs of the nation.¹⁰ German liberals also disagreed on the question as to the form the unified Germany might take: some advocated union of all thirty-nine German states under Prussia, whereas others regarded Austria as the natural leader in German affairs. Albert also underestimated the hostility of Germany's conservatives, including the King Frederick William IV of Prussia, and his heir Prince William--towards liberal reform and the unification of Germany.¹¹ They jealously guarded their power and did not wish to sacrifice it to satisfy the middle class demands for German unity.

Princess Victoria worshiped her father, and it never occurred to her to question either his political views or his choice of Frederick, who was nine years her senior, as her husband. Frederick met Victoria for the first time while visiting the Great Exhibition with his family in 1851. Though Victoria was only eleven years old and Frederick nineteen years of age, they began a correspondence. Four years later, Frederick visited the British royal family at Balmoral Castle in Scotland. He was impressed with the fifteen-year old Princess Victoria, and asked for her hand in marriage.¹² While her parents were enthusiastic about the match, they requested that the marriage be postponed for two years until the prospective bride was seventeen years of age. Frederick's letters to Victoria after their betrothal show that he wished her to improve his home life as his parents' marriage was troubled, and he didn't get along well with either of them.¹³ Shortly before their marriage, Frederick confessed to his future wife:

It is not easy for me to put my feelings concerning my family life into words. Unfortunately, Mama has increasingly made it her habit to raise strong objections to many of my father's actions. This, along with her delicate state of health, has made my infrequent evenings alone with my parents very unpleasant. Since I no longer have the desire to play the role of mediator between the two of them, I often find myself in the most embarrassing of situations.¹⁴

⁸ Martin, *The Prince Consort*, vol. I, p. 447.

⁹ James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chicago and London, 1995), p. 44.

¹⁰ See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914*, (London, 1987), pp. 7-8.

¹¹ Richard Barkeley, *Empress Frederick*, (London, Andesite Press 2015), p. 18.

¹² He wrote his parents, "She speaks intelligently, her eyes are expressive; her presence and movements are very gracious." Prince Frederick William to Prince William and Princess Augusta of Prussia, 14 September 1855, Heinrich Otto Meisner, ed., *Kaiser Friedrich III Tagebücher von 1848 bis 1866*. (Leipzig, 1929), p. 41.

¹³ Archiv of the Hessische Hausstiftung, Schloss Fasanerie, Fulda (hereafter AHH) Prince Frederick William to Princess Victoria, 22 December 1857.

¹⁴ AHH: Prince Frederick William to Princess Victoria, 22 December 1857.

Prince Albert, however, wished to see his daughter do more than alleviate Frederick's domestic woes. He spent hours preparing her to play an active role in making his dream of German unification under a liberalized Prussia a reality.¹⁵ Though the young princess enjoyed these sessions, they left her ill-prepared for her future in Prussia, as Albert underestimated the extent of anti-English sentiment in Prussian ruling circles. When Otto von Bismarck, Prussia's representative at the Diet of the Germanic Confederation in Frankfurt, learned about the impending royal marriage, he wrote:

The English in it does not please me...If the Princess can leave the Englishwoman at home and become a Prussian, then she may be a blessing to the country. If our future Queen on the Prussian throne remains the least bit English, then I see our Court surrounded by English influence?¹⁶

Marriage and Political Disillusionment

The marriage of Princess Victoria and Prince Frederick William took place on 25 January 1858 at the Chapel Royal in St. James' Palace in London. The couple honeymooned in England and departed for Prussia shortly thereafter. Victoria's departure was a wrenching experience for the queen and her family: "The separation, the Queen wrote, "was awful and the poor child was quite broken-hearted at parting from her dearest beloved papa, whom she idolises." ¹⁷

After Victoria moved to Prussia, her father continued to advise her on a regular basis. It was precisely Albert's advice, however, that made Victoria a target of criticism. When Albert insisted that she retain the title of Princess Royal of Britain, he failed to acknowledge the extent to which her English background was disliked by conservatives at court. Albert also expected his daughter to send him detailed reports: "I trust that you will waste no time in replying to this letter, and I expect you to address the issues I have raised point by point."¹⁸ Victoria was also instructed to report to her father any changes in the "moods of the Royal Family and others," while remaining "silent and neutral" in her observations about international politics."¹⁹

Victoria's filial duties kept her busy, but she was far from happy. Her residence in Berlin was gloomy and lacked modern conveniences. The birth of her first child, Prince William, was extremely difficult; mother and child nearly died, and William's left arm was deformed. Although Victoria appeared to adore her new husband, he was frequently away on military tours, leaving her alone to face the hostility of the reactionary members of the Berlin court, who resented her because of her British background. Victoria might have been able to withstand such hostility had she been able to form a close friendship with her mother-in-law, Princess Augusta, who sympathized with her daughter-in-law's liberal political views. But Victoria found herself hard-pressed to tolerate Augusta's bouts of nerves and her domineering personality.²⁰

Victoria also discovered that it would be more difficult to convert her husband into a supporter of English-style liberalism than she and her father had anticipated. Though Frederick

¹⁵ Corti, *English Empress*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁶ Bismarck to Gerlach, 8 April 1856, Barkeley, *Empress Frederick*, p. 43-44.

¹⁷ Sir Frederick Ponsonby, *Letters of the Empress Frederick* (London, 1929), p. 9.

¹⁸ AHH: Prince Albert to Princess Victoria of Prussia, Osborne, 24 March 1858.

¹⁹ AHH: Prince Albert to Princess Victoria of Prussia, Osborne, 3 March 1858.

²⁰ As she told her husband, "Why must she [Augusta] come here and make such scenes just to work her temper off on me? ...I won't put up with it, particularly when it concerns my private affairs, in which I will have no interference, except from you, my darling husband!" Corti, *English Empress*, p. 122.

came to accept their views on the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership, he rejected their belief that reforms to strengthen parliament would have to be enacted before Prussia could assume leadership in the German question. The prince saw unification as a means to strengthen Prussian prestige, but he did not want the powers of the crown undermined by the unification process.²¹ He also appeared to be far more devoted to the military than to liberal causes. When his father made him colonel in chief of a garrison, Frederick was giddy with happiness. As he wrote his wife,

He took me so by surprise that I thought I had misunderstood what he meant. It was only after I had him repeat what he had said, and after my startled reply, "Me?"-- that I began to comprehend what he meant. So, with drawn sword, I led it [the regiment] in the march and was in such a dither of joy that I was really a little crazy!²²

Frederick's preoccupation with military affairs disturbed Albert, who wrote, "that Vicky's husband has lapsed into his family's and his country's playing at soldiers is to be regretted."²³ Feeling alienated in her new homeland, Victoria became more than ever dependent upon her father's advice. As she told her mother: "There are such thousands of things I would like to hear Papa's opinion about. Whatever I hear or see I always think what would Papa say, what would he think? Dear Papa has always been my oracle."²⁴

Although Victoria was shattered by her father's untimely death from typhoid fever in 1861, she continued to try to impress his views on her husband, but to little avail. To the end of his days, Frederick retained his belief that the power of the crown could be in no way compromised by parliament. He believed that liberal reforms such as free expression, free trade and popular education could be achieved without revision of the constitutional status quo. On the other hand, Victoria and her allies in the left liberal parties in Germany insisted that the British political system was ideal for Germany. While husband and wife agreed to disagree on these key political issues for the sake of marital harmony, her ideas antagonized the ultra-conservative Prussian court, and had little support.²⁵

Having failed to convert her husband to her political views, she subsequently tried to get her son William to emulate Prince Albert. But the demands she placed on young William were nearly impossible for him to meet. Although William's deformed arm made extremely difficult for him balance himself on a horse, resulting in repeated falls, she expected him to be "able to ride as well as any of the Prussian princes; I will accept nothing short of that."²⁶ And when William was only six years old, she expected him analyze battles fought during the 1864 war

²¹ Andreas Dorpalen, "Frederick III and the Liberal Movement," *American Historical Review*, Vol. LIV, No. 1, (October 1948), p. 15.

²² AHH: Crown Prince Frederick William to Crown Princess Victoria, Hembinnen, 4 June 1860.

²³ Eyck, *Life of the Prince Consort*, p. 244.

²⁴ Princess Victoria to Queen Victoria, 16 February 1858. Roger Fulford, ed. *Dearest Child. The Private Correspondence of Queen Victoria and the Princess Royal: 1858-1861*. (London, 1964) p. 46.

²⁵ Frank Lorenz Müller writes that "Victoria's unpopularity was—to a significant extent—a self-inflicted wound...she had, in the words of Lamar Cecil, 'an incurable tendency...to do exactly as she pleased and to speak her mind with arresting bluntness, indifferent if not oblivious to the consequences of her behaviour.' Conflicts were often triggered by the irksome differences she perceived between life in Britain, and the—usually inferior—situation she encountered in Prussia." See *Our Fritz: Emperor Frederick III and the Political Culture of Imperial Germany* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 44.

²⁶ AHH: Crown Princess Victoria to Crown Prince Frederick William, 6 September 1864.

with Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein. When William failed to measure up to her standards, she made no secret of her displeasure with him.²⁷ Not surprisingly, William began to distance himself from his mother and rejected her political views.

In the end, Victoria was forced to watch on the sidelines as Germany was unified by the conservative Otto von Bismarck, who became minister president of Prussia in 1862 and chancellor of unified Germany in 1871. Worse still, Victoria could not even get her husband to agree with her where Bismarck was concerned. To her consternation, Bismarck persuaded Frederick to reverse his initial opposition to the war against Austria in 1866. After Germany was unified under Prussian leadership in the wake of its victory in the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, Frederick also supported the promulgation of Bismarck's anti-liberal constitution for the new German empire, along with his policies during the first years of the empire's existence.²⁸ Though Frederick clashed with Bismarck in the late 1870s and 1880s, he also made it clear that he wanted to keep him on as chancellor after he came to the throne.

But when Frederick finally ascended to the throne in 1888 at the age of fifty-seven, he was mortally ill with cancer of the larynx, and reigned for only three months. Although the extent of the differences between the political views of Frederick and Victoria was not well known, it is safe to assume that he would have instituted moderate liberal reforms had it not been for his untimely death. As far as most historians are concerned, Frederick's brief reign was tragic because he and his wife were robbed of the chance to change Germany for the better. Their ultraconservative son and heir, William II, undoubtedly changed Germany for the worse.

Victoria's Work for Women's Causes in Germany

The tragedy of Frederick's premature death and the unfortunate reign of his heir ultimately distracted historians from Victoria's impressive achievements in the realm of social reform, particularly on behalf of women. Her work began in earnest in the late 1860s and early 1870s. By this time, she was no longer the seventeen-year old child bride that had come from a loving, sheltered household to marry Prince Frederick of Prussia. She was not only older, but also free of influence of her parents, who did not prioritize women's causes. This was also precisely the time when she was shut out of the political arena thanks to her husband's rapprochement with Bismarck.

Free from earlier influences and marginalized on the political scene, Victoria found an outlet for her political energies in her work on behalf of women. The timing of her involvement was auspicious. There were few if any women's organizations to speak of when Victoria arrived in Prussia in 1858; these had been quashed by the conservative political reaction in the wake of the revolutions of 1848. The movement began to revive in the 1860s and took its cues from an active women's movement in England, which had established a society to promote employment for women and had overseen the opening of the Queen's College for women. But although the movement was active, the two major organizations that were founded at this time were divided. The German Women's Union (Allgemeine Deutsche Frauenverein or ADF) based in Leipzig, was seen as radical as it was self-supporting, excluded men from membership, and promoted universal suffrage. Dr. Adolf Lette's eponymous Lette Association (Letteverein), on the other

²⁷ John C.G. Röhl *Young William: The Kaiser's Early Life, 1858-1888*. (Boston: Cambridge University Press; Reprint edition (July 28, 2017), p. 233

²⁸ Müller, *Our Fritz*, p. 53; Kollander, *Frederick III*, pp. 153-154.

hand, looked to create job opportunities for middle class women, and did not support suffrage or full equality between men and women.²⁹

The Lette Association's emphasis on creating jobs for women stemmed from the impact of the Industrial Revolution, which had restructured family life. Since men of the newly minted middle class were at work in professions, they tended to marry after they had accumulated a suitable fortune. As a result, marriage and job prospects for bourgeois women were limited. The Lette Association was one of several organizations which tried to make professions available to middle class women by providing them an appropriate education.³⁰

Victoria supported Lette's idea to establish a technical school for girls in Germany and became the royal patron of the Lette Association in 1866. In the years to come, she was the driving force behind an enormously successfully fund-raising campaign for the organization.³¹ According to historian James Albisetti, the Lette Association had a marked impact on working women in Berlin:

The Lette Association... opened the Victoria Bazaar to provide an outlet for the sale of women's handiwork and an employment bureau that tried to match applicants with available positions. It also supported a home for temporarily unemployed governesses. Most important, it took over an existing technical school...which it gradually enlarged to provide a whole complex of courses... In addition, it successfully petitioned the government to open employment in German post and telegraph offices to women.³²

The Lette Association also served as model for similar organizations that sprang up in Darmstadt, Breslau, Hamburg, Braunschweig, and Kassel.³³

For Victoria, the issues of working women were part of a larger context that she and fellow liberals often referred to as the "social question." In 1870, she stressed the importance of this issue in a letter to her husband:

*My dream is that all the treasures of German erudition and intellect will be concentrated on the solution of the social question. France cannot do this because [the French] lack mental balance. England cannot do this because the contrast between rich and poor is too great. But in Germany, where no similar great fortunes exist, the way to the solution [of this question] is open.*³⁴

It is important to note, however, that Victoria's concept of the social question did not include socialism per se or women's suffrage. Although she met briefly with socialist leader

²⁹ Margit Götttert, "Victoria und die Deutsche Frauenbewegung" in Rainer von Hessen, ed., *Victoria, Kaiserin Friedrich (1840-1901). Mission und Schicksal einer englischen Prinzessin in Deutschland.* (Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/New York, 2002), pp. 97-98

³⁰ James Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls and Women. Secondary and Higher Education in the Nineteenth Century.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), and Laura Tate, "The Culture of Literary Bildung in the Bourgeois Women's Movement in Imperial Germany." *German Studies Review*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (May 2001), pp. 267-281

³¹ Götttert, "Victoria und die Deutsche Frauenbewegung" p. 97.

³² Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls*, p. 102

³³ Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls*, p. 103

³⁴ AHH: Crown Princess Victoria to Crown Prince Frederick William, Berlin, 20 February 1871.

Friedrich LaSalle, she had nothing but disdain for socialist philosophy. She also strayed away from pro-suffrage organizations such as Louise Otto's Allgemeine Deutsche Frauenverein. Her distance is understandable given how radical the concept of women's suffrage was at this time in Germany. As a liberal, Victoria's position at ultra conservative Prussian court was already difficult; it would have been downright impossible had she supported pro-women's suffrage organizations such as the Allgemeine Deutsche Frauenverein.³⁵ In any case, Victoria would have done herself a disservice by supporting the ADF, as most of her liberal male cohorts were opposed to women's suffrage. Nor did Victoria--via her association with women such as pedagogue and feminist Helene Lange and early childhood advocate Henrietta Breymann-Schrader--support the idea of women entering traditionally male-dominated professions such as medicine and law.³⁶

Victoria's work hence focused mostly on education for women. In 1868, she founded the Victoria-Lyceum, which allowed upper class women to attend lectures given by university professors. At a time when upper class women were educated primarily to become raconteurs in salons, the Lyceum stood apart. It was modeled after similar institutions in England that eventually supported the admission of female students to mainstream universities in Britain. She also created scholarships for students, and contributed her own artwork to organizational fundraisers.³⁷

She also became a patron of organizations promoting better health care for women. Her meeting with Florence Nightingale in the 1870s inspired her to help found an association for domestic health maintenance in Berlin, which provided a clinic for women and children, and promoted education for nurses.³⁸ It is important to note that many of the men and women who were involved in these organizations—such as Helene Lange, Rudolf Virchow, Henriette Breymann-Schrader, Karl Schrader, and Georg von Bunsen—were friends of the crown princess and supported her political views as well.

In the late 1870s and 1880s, conservative parties and policies dominated German political life, and Victoria railed against the tenor of German politics. In 1884, she saw an opportunity for the liberal movement to re-assert itself when the left-liberal Deutsche Freisinnige Partei (German Free-Thinking Party) was founded. At this time, the emperor was well into his 80s, and the accession of his son Frederick seemed imminent, and the new party was hence committed to constructing a political base for a liberal regime under the future emperor. Its goals included increasing the power of parliament and resuming the process of liberal reform that had been halted by Bismarck. Frederick did not support Freisinnige Partei, as it wished to strengthen the parliament. Nonetheless, Victoria remained determined to bring the party to power. She even suggested that Bismarck could stay on as foreign minister if he relinquished control over domestic policy to the Freisinn party. But Victoria did not consider the very real possibility that Bismarck would refuse to serve with ministers who wished drastically to revise his domestic policy.³⁹

This conservatism of the 1880s affected education for women as well. The head of the Prussian Ministry of Culture who had promoted education for women, Adalbert Falk, resigned in

³⁵ Göttert, "Victoria und die Deutsche Frauenbewegung," p. 98

³⁶ Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls*, p. 117

³⁷ Göttert, "Victoria und die Deutsche Frauenbewegung," p. 98

³⁸ Göttert, "Victoria und die Deutsche Frauenbewegung," p. 101

³⁹ Kollander, *Frederick III*, pp. 215-217.

1879, and his successor, Robert von Puttkammer, had no interest in women's education.⁴⁰ In 1887, however, the subject was brought to the government's attention when a controversial petition and pamphlet, authored by Victoria's friend Henriette Lange, was submitted to the Ministry of Education. Again, the timing of this event is important, as Frederick's father, Emperor William I, was ninety years old and ailing in 1887, and she expected to become empress at any moment, Victoria probably felt that she could incur the risk of being associated with the petition and pamphlet. Along with advanced training for teachers, the petition aimed to give women more authority in girls' schools.⁴¹ The pamphlet, later called the "Yellow Brochure," was controversial because it insisted that girls should be educated to pursue careers, not to be better wives for their husbands, and that women should head all-female schools.⁴² In short, the pamphlet called for a drastic revision of the status quo in girls' schools, and as such it aroused the ire of many male teachers.

Although the Prussian House of Deputies ultimately rejected the petition and pamphlet, Victoria realized elements of both when she came to the throne. At her instigation, the board of directors of the Victoria Lyceum asked the Ministry of Education to allow the Lyceum to offer advanced courses to women teachers. The proposal was approved, and the new courses were offered for the first time in October 1888.

After her husband's untimely death, Victoria's influence was challenged by her son, the new emperor William II, whose disdain for liberalism in general and women's rights in particular was well known. When her plans to build for a large institution for the education of women fell through, she fought back by proposing the establishment of the "Kaiser Frederick Society." As she wrote her friend:

A small army of people must rally around Emperor Frederick's name and programme... If the government has neither the time nor the inclination for this project, we will have to take it upon ourselves... I think that if a movement (called the Kaiser Frederick Society) were fostered throughout Germany, it could promote all the points contained in his program...it could...promote the spreading of the liberal reconstruction of Germany among the masses.⁴³

But although Victoria insisted that the Kaiser Frederick Society was not meant to oppose the conservative government of her son, she wanted it to be staffed by members of the left liberal *Freisinnige Partei*. Victoria also wished to lead the organization herself if she were deemed "suitable for the job." Germany's problems, she concluded, could only be solved if handled in the "modern, liberal sense."⁴⁴ Victoria's plans for the organization bearing her husband's name show that what she perceived to be her husband's ideals far more resembled her own. And thanks to the ill-will between Victoria and her son, the Society never materialized.

Undeterred by failure of the Kaiser Frederick Society, she continued to work behind the scenes with prominent activists such as Helene Lange to promote better education for female teachers and their pupils and made personal appearances in support of their activities. She lent support-- financial and otherwise-- to practically all organizations promoting women's education

⁴⁰ Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls and Women*, p. 113

⁴¹ Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls and Women*, p. 136

⁴² Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls and Women*, p. 152

⁴³ AHH: Empress Frederick to Frau Stockmar, 8 August 1888.

⁴⁴ AHH: Empress Frederick to Frau Stockmar, 8 August 1888.

in Berlin. While the radical feminist leader and suffragist Minna Cauer acknowledged the fact that Victoria did not support women's suffrage, she nonetheless praised her for promoting the participation of women in public life.⁴⁵ Victoria supported forty-one charitable organizations in her lifetime, and her support for women's causes was far more extensive than was the case with her mother, Queen Victoria, her mother-in-law, the Empress Augusta, who focused on the education of elite women, and her daughter-in-law Empress Augusta-Victoria, who exhibited no interest in women's causes.⁴⁶

Towards a Better Understanding of Victoria's Work and its Impact

The fact that Victoria's positive achievements in this arena have been ignored or underestimated is due to a number of factors. First of all, the tragedy of the brief reign of her husband overshadowed the impact of her support for women's causes. In other words, the significance of what she actually accomplished was overshadowed by what might have been. She herself appears not to have recognized the positive impact of her work. This may well be because she was aspired to influence at the top of the political structure, and this was something that she was denied. After her husband's death, she lamented the fact that his brief reign had robbed her of the opportunity to work for, as she herself put it, "freedom and culture, for individual independence, for the improvement of the single person as a man and German...improvement, progress, ennoblement, that was our motto."⁴⁷ Her sentiments were echoed by women's rights activists such as Gertrude Bäumer, who wrote, "the death of Emperor Frederick III destroyed prospects for a thoroughgoing expansion of women's education."⁴⁸

What is ironic, however, is though Victoria herself did not attach much significance to her accomplishments in the realm of social reform, she in fact realized many points of her liberal program within the context of her work for women. Although she was unable to implement her reforms on as grand a scale as she had hoped, she made it possible for many women to achieve individual independence via education. Because women's education advanced feminism in Germany, Victoria played an important and heretofore largely unheralded part in German women's movement.

Finally, the lack of attention to Victoria's accomplishments in the realm of social reform is in no small measure due to the limitations in the methodologies of political and social historians alike. Political historians usually focus on the activities of elite power brokers and ignore social activism unless it is sponsored by government initiatives. Biographers of royal women have based their work on the political perspective and have followed this tack. Yet they do their subjects a disservice by not investigating the extent of their support for women's causes. None of the full-length biographies of Victoria discuss the importance of either her linkages with women's rights advocates, or her overall impact on social reform. Biographers of other royal women follow this trend.⁴⁹ A recent work on the lives of five of Queen Victoria's

⁴⁵ Göttert, "Victoria und die Deutsche Frauenbewegung," p. 109

⁴⁶ Albisetti, "Empress Frederick and Female Education" p. 349. An account of Augusta Victoria's life written in 1921 emphasizes her devotion to *Kinder*, *Küche* and *Kirche* and adds that "in politics, literature and the arts she took no part and evinced little interest." Littell, Eliakim; Littell, Robert S. "The Last Hohenzollern Empress," in *The Living Age*, vol. 309. (London, 1921), p. 511

⁴⁷ Erich Eyck, *Bismarck and the German Empire*, (London, 1968), p. 299

⁴⁸ Cited in Ute Gerhard's *Unerhört*. Die Geschichte der deutschen Frauenbewegung (Hamburg, 1991), p. 154.

⁴⁹ Although Gisela Bock writes that Queen Victoria "though nothing of women's rights," she expressed her interest in women's education in a letter to her daughter: "The case of the women is one which I have a very strong feeling

granddaughters says much about their peripheral involvement in politics, the upbringing of their children, and their travels, but precious little about their activities on behalf of women.⁵⁰ Nor have social historians given Victoria her due. Most historians of the women's movement in Germany devote a lot of space to activists such as Schrader-Breymann and Lange-- but omit Victoria as important player because she was member of the elite.⁵¹ The fact that Victoria's contributions as social reformer has been generally ignored--shows that boundaries in the two disciplines need to be at least reconciled, if not altogether eliminated.

upon. I think they should be sensibly educated—and employed whenever they can be usefully, but on no account unsexed and made doctors (except in one branch), lawyers, voters, etc.” Queen Victoria to Crown Princess Victoria, June 26, 1872. Roger Fulford, ed., *Darling Child. Private Correspondence of Queen Victoria and the German Crown Princess* (London: Evans Brothers Publishing, 1981), p. 51. Gisela Bock, *Women in European History*. (Oxford, 2002), p. 93.

⁵⁰ Julia P. Gelardi. *Born to Rule: Five Reigning Consorts, Granddaughters of Queen Victoria*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).

⁵¹ Ute Frevert devotes several pages to Helene Lange but none to Victoria. Ute Frevert, *Women in German History* (Providence, RI and Oxford, UK, 1987). Gisela Bock briefly notes that Victoria “sympathized with the women's movement” but does not go into her activism. Gisela Bock, *Women in European History* (Oxford, UK, 2002) p. 93. The same is generally true of Ute Gerhard's *Unerhört*, and Christina Klausmann's *Politik und Kultur der Frauenbewegung im Kaiserreich* (Frankfurt, 1997). Again, important exceptions to this rule include the work of James Albisetti and Margit Göttert mentioned above.