

# PLAYING THE KING

By P. W. WILSON

OF the surprises that have followed the war, one of the strangest is the fact that, with the three great Emperors of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia driven from their ancient and solid thrones, there should remain the King of England, still firmly established in his sovereignty and, amid a world of republics, more influential today than at any previous period in his reign. This anomaly is the more challenging because King George is by birth a first cousin of the Kaiser, now living in ignominious exile, and also of the late Czar, whom he has resembled in appearance and in domestic tastes, both men inheriting much from their mothers, who were sister Princesses of the Danish royal house. Nor is it in his dynasty that King George can or would claim any particular superiority. While the House of Hohenzollern produced Frederick the Great, the House of Hanover was represented by the first four Georges, so pitilessly described by Thackeray; and one of them, the third, dying as often he had lived, insane. Also, not one monarch of that house has ever displayed the titanic energy of the Romanoff, Peter the Great. On the contrary, we now read with amusement the sycophantic eulogies showered upon George IV., "the first gentleman in Europe," and even the prestige of Queen Victoria is tested by the polite ironies of Mr. Strachey.

The British throne is capable of a gorgeous pageantry, like the opening of Parliament or the still more impressive coronations and jubilee parades. But no institution has been subjected to a fiercer furnace of ridicule. The earlier volumes of Punch are full of such destructive banter. So were the Ingoldsby Legends and the musical comedies of Gilbert and Sullivan, with their insistence on the illogical absurdity of the hereditary principle and their pictures of crowns and coronets so nearly toppling from absurd heads. In Russia and Germany this would have been lese majesté, punishable with prison and Siberia, but in England it was all permitted, indeed encouraged, except in one case, "The Mikado," where diplomacy feared that offense would be given to upholders of divine

right in Japan. But, amid all the laughter, the Court goes on as usual, either at Buckingham Palace or at Windsor Castle. Because Lewis Carroll in his Wonderland makes jokes about Kings and Queens and knights and knaves, England does not cease to play her regular games of chess and cards, where Kings and Queens are considered essential. When Mark Twain writes about a

responsible for the consequences." King Edward had humor. He could join in the laugh at the part he was born to play. On his stage he was a success, because he never mistook his make-up for real life. In the House of Hanover qualities have recurred every alternate generation. The serious morality of George III. was displayed by his granddaughter Victoria, and again by his grandson,

During the war there were moments when the Throne was bound to be embarrassed. And Mr. Lloyd George insisted on drastic action. Princes who had taken the side of Germany were dispossessed of their British peerages and pensions and expelled from the House of Lords. Monarchs fighting against the Allies were struck from the Order of the Garter, and their banners removed

thought and outlook there is not now a more characteristic British household. Princess Patricia of Connaught has been married to plain Captain Ramsay, and has renounced her royal titles, while the brother of the Queen of Spain married a daughter of the Earl of Londesborough, whose peerage in that degree is one of the most recent. The Throne has ceased to be international. With the collapse of royalty in Germany and Russia it is, indeed, isolated. It depends wholly upon the British Commonwealth of nations. And yet it continues.

The reason is that if the British Crown were as ridiculous as George II. did his best to make it, the British people would still regard it as a necessary political expedient. It is to the British Empire what the flag is to the United States, an emblem of diverse yet converging loyalties which are at one over no other object. The Australian does not want the Indian in his country, but both Australians and Indians see the King's head on their postage stamps. The wider the British sovereignty the more important becomes the person of the sovereign. Every assertion of autonomy by the Dominions means that it is in the Crown, not in the Imperial Parliament, that the empire holds together. Canada and Australia have their own House of Commons and do not need to go to London for representative institutions. But only in London can Australia and Canada find that link with the immemorial past which is supplied by the British monarchy.

The idea that the King is a mere figure-head, accepting the advice of his Ministers, was never entirely true and is not true today. The King is a constitutional sovereign—granted—but there are now in his empire many Constitutions and many nations, not one alone. Mr. Lloyd George tends advice, but the King may well answer that there are other

Prime Ministers also tendering advice—that General Smuts has useful ideas about Ireland and Mr. Meighen of Canada important objections to the Anglo-Japanese alliance. Mr. Hughes of Australia is also one of the King's constitutional advisers, and the day has passed when the Dominions could only approach the

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"Gentlemen—the King!"

Yankee at the Court of King Arthur, he is answered by an invitation to their Majesties' garden party, where one saw him clad conspicuous in Palm Beach suit and Panama hat, while a well-groomed Goldstick told him that the King would like to meet him.

"Tell his Majesty," was the reply, "that I should be most happy to have a chat, but that I won't be

George V. It is from his grandfather, Edward VII., that the Prince of Wales has derived his gay detachment from undue solemnity. When duty demands it he, too, will wear the enormous feathers in his hat and be thus photographed. But the camera also records his falls on the hunting field and his surf bathing at Honolulu, a corrective in both cases to pretense.

from St. George's Chapel, Windsor. The House of Hanover was renamed the House of Windsor. The Battenbergs were to be henceforth the Mountbattens, and seven Highnesses were changed into Marquises and Earls. The royal family was thus Anglicized, and at the British Court there was to be for the future neither Teutonic taint nor Teutonic tongue. In habits, in speech, in

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Throne through a subordinate Minister, the Colonial Secretary. In granting Constitutions to the Dominions, Britain did not realize that she was providing pillars for the throne, with foundations laid far beyond her shores. As matters now stand, a revolution in England would shatter the British Empire. If England wanted a change, it is by no means certain that the change would be welcome in Canada and New Zealand.

A new importance must be attached, therefore, to the personality of the British sovereign. We have seen him restraining Mr. Lloyd George's comments on French policy, smoothing over another of the Prime Minister's indiscretions which had disturbed Colonel Harvey, and initiating proposals for a truce in Ireland. The King's relations with his Prime Minister are thus a subject which will greatly interest the historian. Their friendship began with King Edward's death. Other Ministers kissed hands with the new monarch, and uttered the usual protestations of loyal sympathy. Mr. Lloyd George, however, exclaimed: "I want to tell you, sir, that in your father we had not only the King but a personal friend." King George was moved and replied: "Mr. Lloyd George, you are the first man who has said to me a human word." With that almost uncanny tact of which he is master, Mr. Lloyd George recognized that the Queen is, first and foremost, a mother. As Minister in Attendance, therefore, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as he then was, usually brought presents for the youngsters, who, with their parents, found him irresistible. As Prime Minister Mr. Lloyd George has no right to expect from the King more than acquiescence in his policy. But he knew that the sovereign was a man endowed with a touch of the obstinacy which led George III. to alienate the American Colonies and obstruct Catholic Emancipation. It was the obstinacy which enabled Queen Victoria to prevent a warlike dispatch

going to President Lincoln, and yet betrayed her into hostility to United Italy. In King George's case this obstinacy forced Parliament to revise the brutal terms of the Protestant Declaration as drafted in the eighteenth century; it carried the King and Queen to the Coronation Durbar in India and to the opening of Parliament in Belfast. It impelled him to defend his personal character in a court of law. To stand well with the King has seemed to the adroit Prime Minister, therefore, to be worth a little diplomacy. How successfully diplomacy was applied we may judge from the unprecedented honor paid Mr. Lloyd George when the entire royal family met him at the station on his return from the negotiations in Paris.

Since that day Mr. Lloyd George has had to face many crises, and in more than one of them he has "played the King" as the reserve card in his hand. When Labor does not quite know how to retreat from an impossible position, trade union leaders are seen at Buckingham Palace. And so with the Dominions, the Irish, the Indian Empire, the Ambassadors of foreign countries. This "playing the King" has been of an immense assistance during the chaos, but it is a game that must, in the nature of things, work both ways. The King is also "playing Lloyd George." When a Minister begins to depend on the Crown in his difficulties, instead of depending wholly on Parliament, he endows the Crown with a discretion over his own future. There are many matters in which he will not wish to offend the Crown. And the King who has carried out the suggestions of his Minister may consider that he is entitled also to make suggestions. Why should not the Prince of Wales attend the Washington conference as "spectator"?—and so on. The influence of George III. over parties in Parliament was enormous. Even William Pitt, the younger, only governed with the King at his back. Things are not thus at Westminster today, but if Mr. Lloyd George's majority

became less compact the time might easily come when the King could say that perhaps the people should be consulted. The Sovereign would scarcely order a dissolution of Parliament, but he might advocate it. And if his advocacy were rejected and things went wrong afterward, he would be able to remind Ministers in these difficulties that his counsel had not been followed.

In working an unwritten Constitution these daily pressures and persuasions count for a good deal, especially, when a sovereign is at the other end of the telephone. As Bagehot has told us, he cannot be talked to quite as we talk to one another. And in King George's case he has on his side not only royal status but knowledge. On India he can say to Mr. Lloyd George: "I have been there. I have traveled that country from shore to shore." Of Australia he can add that he opened the first Parliament of the Commonwealth. And so for Canada and the rest of the British Empire. King George spent his early years as a real sailor. He worked as any "middie" works, commanded ships as any other officer commands ships, learned navigation and machinery, and lived more afloat than on shore. Much of his life is devoted to meeting people, and they, the best minds, on the whole, in the country. This must broaden any serious man's judgment. And the King and Queen are thus serious in their public service. Their piety is not an invention of flatterers; it is an ascertained fact. Their answer to socialism is a sympathetic and attentive ear for any Socialist who has anything real to say. Will Crooks of Woolwich and Poplar was their valued friend, and often he has told me of his trips on the trams with the King and Queen. He would tell them stories full of a pathetic and tender humor, and they would listen and laugh and learn. Britain and her dominions are, in fact, republics; subjects of the King are, in fact, citizens; but it is still curious how an adaptive genius has utilized royal forms, elsewhere outworn and effete and even mischievous.