

REVIEW.

"THE KING'S GRACE
1910-1935."*

"THE ENGLISHMAN IS TAUGHT TO LOVE THE KING AS HIS FRIEND, BUT TO ACKNOWLEDGE NO OTHER MASTER THAN THE LAWS WHICH HIMSELF HAS CONTRIBUTED TO ENACT."

GOLDSMITH, *Citizen of the World.*

"The King's Grace 1910-1935" is a happily timed and well-planned volume from the pen of the distinguished author John Buchan, recently appointed Governor-General of Canada, upon whom the King has been pleased to confer a peerage.

In his short preface the author reminds us that "this book is not a biography of the King, the time for which has happily not yet come, but an attempt to provide a picture—and some slight interpretation—of his reign, with the throne as the continuing thing through an epoch of unprecedented change."

The book contains some excellent portraits of the King at various periods of his reign as well as one with the Queen in which Their Majesties are depicted in their coronation robes. The frontispiece shows the King broadcasting at Sandringham, and underneath it are the concluding words of the broadcast,

"May I add very simply and sincerely that if I may be regarded in some true sense the head of this great and widespread family, sharing its life and sustained by its affection, this will be a full reward for the long and sometimes anxious labours of my reign of well-nigh five and twenty years."

During fifteen centuries there have been kings in Britain, and in the last two hundred years "while the Throne has lost in definable powers, it has gained in significance It has come closer to the lives and interests of the citizen. The King is to-day far more a people's king than when an Edward or a Henry returned in triumph from the French wars. The office has come into the light of common day without losing its traditional glamour. Its dignity has not declined, but affection has been joined to reverence. Since the Tudors the phrase has been the King's Majesty. To-day the older form of words is the more fitting, the King's Grace."

The book is divided into three parts: the first carries us up to 1914, the second covers the period of the Great War, and the third brings us down to the present time under the headings "sour-apple harvest," "the changing Empire," "a house in order" and concluding with the epilogue.

From the first year of his reign His Majesty had heavy preoccupations and responsibilities. The "Parliament Bill" limiting the powers of the House of Lords, and the Irish Question, were matters of anxious concern. In addition, in November, 1911, the King and Queen sailed for India, where the King, in person, announced His coronation, and as is the custom of the East on such occasions commemorated it with marks of especial favour.

"The first seven months of 1914 saw the British nation living like some prosperous settlement on the glaxis of a volcano—a merry and full life with a background of sleeping fears.

"If it was a difficult time for Ministers, it was more difficult for the King. He was being urged from every side to intervene, to refuse the royal assent to the Home Rule Bill, to appeal himself to the nation, to avert at any cost civil war. Throughout the agitation he had kept a cool head, and had been untiring in his efforts for peace. But few men have been in a harder position, and there was

pathos in his quotation in a letter to Mr. Asquith at the beginning of June, of a sentence from his Coronation message: 'Whatever perplexities or difficulties may lie before me and my people, we shall all unite in facing them resolutely, calmly, and with public spirit, confident that, under divine guidance, the ultimate outcome may be to the common good.'"

One last effort His Majesty made to achieve this hope by summoning in his own name a conference of the Party leaders at Buckingham Palace, and in that summons made the following solemn appeal.

"We have in the past endeavoured to act as a civilising example to the world, and to me it is unthinkable, as it must be to you, that we should be brought to the brink of fratricidal strife upon issues apparently so capable of adjustment as those which you are now asked to consider if handled in a spirit of generous compromise." The conference broke down. The Home Rule Bill must become law at once in order to take advantage of the Parliament Act. When that moment arrived it seemed that nothing but a miracle could prevent civil war.

However, "a world earthquake was to forestall a local landslide. Would that landslide have come if the greater shock had not intervened?"

The tense anxiety of the opening days of August, 1914, is still within the memory of very many.

On August 3rd, in the House of Commons, Sir Edward Grey, as Foreign Secretary, made a statement such as only he could have made. "It was the expression in plain words without rhetoric or passion of a most honest and peace-loving mind, which had left no channel of mediation untried, which had striven against every rebuff to avert calamity, and which now sadly but inevitably was forced toward war. The gist of his speech was, in the words that he wrote later, that 'if we did not stand by France and stand up for Belgium against this aggression, we should be isolated, discredited, and hated, and there would be before us nothing but a miserable and ignoble future.' Britain, thanks partly to the wisdom of her leaders, but mainly to chance, faced war with a united Government, a united people, and a united Empire."

As we read the chapters dealing with the War the figure of the King stands out as an example of courage, fortitude, resolution, and of deep sympathy with the fighting forces, and the civilian population at home. Reference is made to the accident to His Majesty on his visit to the Front in October, 1915, "carefully concealed from the public, which might have had the gravest consequences. . . . He was proceeding to inspect a squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, when an unexpected outbreak of cheering made his horse rear and fall back on him, slipping on the muddy ground. For a moment the King lay very still, and the onlookers feared the worst. But he struggled to his feet, and was carried to his car and taken back to Aire. So serious his accident seemed that the Prince of Wales left at once to report to the Queen. . . . It was only by a narrow margin that Britain escaped what would have been the crowning mischance of a melancholy year."

The King's illness in November, 1928, following a chill contracted on Armistice Day, which developed into a dangerous pleurisy from which, in his own words, he was brought back from danger and weariness by the "wonderful skill and devotion of my doctors, surgeons and nurses," had the further effect of impressing upon His Majesty "the widespread and loving solicitude with which the Queen and I were surrounded. It was an encouragement beyond description" he wrote "to find that my constant and earnest desire had been granted—the desire to gain the confidence and affection of my people."

Much more might be quoted from this most interesting book, but every one will surely want to read it, and its price brings it within reach of all.

M. B.

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