

## Edward VII.: The Man and the King

WHEN Thackeray was beginning his immortal lecture on that eminently respectable person the Third George, he complained that sixty years had to be glanced over in as many minutes, and then, having enumerated a few of the greatest events of those years, he ended the paragraph, "And George III. had to be alive through all these varied changes, to accompany his people through all these revolutions of thought, government, society, to survive out of the old world into ours." Yet my task is a worse one than Thackeray's for the period under consideration is as long, is marked by an infinitely greater measure of progress, and my essay must be very much more brief than his was. So let us "cut the cackle and get to the 'osses," or if you would like "choice Latin, pickled phrase, Tully's every word," let us rush *in medias res*.

Why is King Edward VII. far and away the most popular man in his kingdom at this moment? We know—or think that we know—all about him, which comes to the same thing as accurate knowledge so far as the effect on our minds is concerned. Forty years have passed since, immediately after his father's death, the *Times* spoke anxiously of "the Prince of Wales of whom we know so little," and he has been before the public eye all the time. The fierce light which beats upon a throne has been turned upon the King continually; "peering littlenesses" have watched his goings-out and his comings-in; scandal has marked him down for her victim more than once: nobody has ever claimed for him consistent saintliness of life or commanding force of intellect; and yet, clearly and indisputably he is certainly more liked, and liked by more people, than any other Englishman, not excepting even Lord Roberts to whom belongs, equally without question, the second place in the popular esteem.

Nor, really, is the reason very far to seek, for in the King's character is to be found a wonderful and rare combination of the qualities and the instincts which make for popularity of the best sort. Foremost

among them are his personal kindness of disposition, his tact, and his astonishing facility in recognising and remembering faces, which suggest themselves naturally for simultaneous mention, for the last two spring obviously from the first. Innumerable stories, some true, some false, others hovering over the border-line between truth and falsehood, have been told against the King; but not one of them has ever so much as



H.M. the King at the age of seven

(From a painting by F. Winterhalter)

suggested that he was guilty of an unkind act. If it had, it would have been scouted at once as wanting in vraisemblance. Before all things the King is a really good-natured and kind-hearted man, possessed of that consideration for the feelings of others which is the true and only foundation of good manners. This trait was noticeable from his earliest years, and Dean Stanley, whose knowledge of his character was perhaps closer than that of any other man except Sir Francis Knollys, called attention to it over and over again in writing home, when he and the Prince of Wales made their memorable tour in Egypt and the Holy Land. The memory of faces, of which hundreds of stories have been told, is of a piece with this consideration; indeed, it springs out of it. One of the best instances of it is given in Mr. J. E. Vincent's "From Cradle to Crown," where we are told that Mr. Vincent once had the honour of accompanying the King when he was paying a private visit to the Rowton Houses late in the last century. Kindness was the motive of the visit, undertaken in order to see whether the Rowton Houses would be a suitable model for barrack accommodation, and it was kindness which prompted the Prince of Wales (as he was then) to recognise in the superintendent an ex-soldier of the 10th Hussars, his favourite regiment, upon whom he had not set eyes for thirty years. "Yes. I remember. You were in the 10th, and we were together on Salisbury Plain in 1871," were the words which made that superintendent a proud man that day. Acts of this kind have been recounted of the King truly by the score, and they and his tact of which they are the offspring, cannot but arise from unselfishness. The King is not self-centred nor always thinking of himself and of his own interests. That is why he is able to remember other people and their faces so much better than anybody else, except perhaps his son, can.

Again, and this is not the least important of his qualities, the King is a man of simply extraordinary energy. Like his mother, Queen Victoria, who always retired to bed very late and rose early invariably, insomuch that her ladies-in-waiting were often severely

tried, the King can keep his health unimpaired upon an allowance of sleep which ordinary men find quite insufficient; and though his nights are as a rule very late, no morning can begin too early for him. Indeed, at Sandringham (where, by the way, there are several hundred clocks to which a special man from London [pays periodical visits of inspection), the time kept is half an hour ahead of Greenwich, so that an invitation to shoot at Sandringham in which ten in the morning is mentioned as the hour of arrival, is really an invitation for half-past nine. Moreover, punctuality is insisted upon by the King who, being himself wonderfully punctual and methodical, expects these virtues in his guests and in his entourage. It is by virtue of the practice of them that he is able to accomplish the enormous amount of work and play which he contrives to squeeze into his life. His life, be it at Sandringham or at Marlborough House, or in these later days at Windsor or Balmoral is one of incessant movement which, in a person of his exalted position, might almost be called, restlessness. There are always State papers to be attended to with the same regularity which was observed in the Queen, who never kept her Ministers waiting, even when most distracted by personal sorrow; there is private correspondence; there are the minute details of courtly ceremonials in which he takes keen and personal interest; there are public duties to perform; shooting and yachting parties to be organised; the farm at Sandringham, and the racing stables to supervise in person; endless theatres to be attended, and all the rest of it. The King, in fact, is able in some mysterious way to perform all his duties with punctilious care, to be incessantly moving about from place to place, and apparently, to enjoy every hour of life, and yet at the same time never to be tired and never to be hurried. That is a rare combination of accomplishments, singularly valuable as a possession for a King.

Then it is very plain to those who have studied the King's life that he is a deeply religious man and a very warm-hearted one. The reference here is not to those great public occasions, the funeral of his father,



The King in academical gown. After a painting by Sir J. W. Gordon in the Bodleian Library, Oxford



Her Majesty Queen Alexandra in her wedding dress

of his son and of his mother, upon which his depth of feeling has been conspicuously shown before the eyes of his people, but to that which is known of his real feelings, principally from the letters of Dean Stanley, whose religious influence over him was probably stronger than any other man. Dean Stanley's account of that Easter Sunday of long ago spent on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, of the frequent evidence that the sermons in the East were not wasted upon his Royal hearer and of the succeeding Easter spent at Sandringham immediately after the marriage to Queen Alexandra in 1863 are proof positive of this. Decorous and regu-

lar in his attendance at church, as a country gentleman ought always to be for example's sake, even, although his convictions may not be deep, the King has always been ; but the proofs that he is a sincere and a genuine Christian are also abundant and grateful. Perhaps the most cogent of them is to be found in the splendid record of his work done for hospitals in Sir Henry Burdett's "Prince, Princess, and People." It is from these pages that one learns to appreciate that the King has given to hospitals and to innumerable charities not merely money and patronage, but honest and hard work and the warmest of sympathy. 'This King of ours is never content to be a figure-head. His estate at Sandringham is not very large, but he farms a thousand acres of it and takes a keen personal interest in the stock which, especially in the matter of shire horses and short-horn cattle, is a model to the whole country. Few country gentlemen take so much personal care as the King for the management of their estates. As a yachtsman, again, he is no mere passenger, and he knew the points of that

beautiful yacht *Britannia*, as well as a Watson, or a Lord Dunraven, or as his Imperial nephew himself. He has laughed as heartily as any other member of the Royal Yacht Squadron over the story of the would-be sportsman, who, having purchased a famous racing yacht without knowing anything about her, telegraphed shortly afterwards ordering steam to be got up and stating that he and a party of city friends would go out for a cruise the next day. He takes the keenest and most intelligent interest in the handling of his yachts, and in the affairs of the Royal Yacht Squadron, the most exclusive yacht club in the world.

Indeed it has even been whispered that more than once his Majesty has been not a little annoyed because he has not had his own way absolutely in the matter of the election of members.

In the lines which have been written, attention has been paid principally to tastes and qualities, and nothing has been said of the King's mental abilities. Nor now is it intended to claim that his Majesty possesses anything in the nature of genius. For that matter, his mother, by universal consent the best Sovereign who ever sat on any throne, had nothing which could be called genius either. But she had wisdom and common sense, and the King has inherited them from her. Truth to tell, a King possessed of genius is not, as the subjects of the German Emperor are tempted to think on occasion, an unmixed blessing; with a constitution like ours he might even be something of a nuisance, for he would want his own way and he would be under the constant temptation to mistake his eccentricities for originality. Sober wisdom in affairs is

really far more valuable to the nation, and there is not the slightest doubt that the King may always be relied upon to show it, in the future as in the past. "You will find," said one of his close associates to the writer on the night when Queen Victoria died, "that the Prince of Wales has his head screwed on the

right way." As a matter of fact when these homely words were spoken, there had been no Prince of Wales for several hours, but they expressed the facts aptly none the less. The King is simply a remarkably sensible man of the world, of versatile tastes and of wide and



Her Majesty Queen Alexandra

(From a painting by R. Lauchert)

generous sympathies; and that is the kind of King whom England wants.

Finally, the King has, as all men must observe, a just regard for the formal dignity of his position, and there have been those who were inclined to speak disparagingly of the scrupulous care with which he looks to the



(Mills, photo, London)

The latest statue of King Edward VII

details of Court ceremonies and even of dress. To them the State coach with its somewhat barbaric splendour is an anachronism; the processions through London and like things of which the King is distinctly fond are but empty ostentation from their point of view. But these persons, who would make life very dull and grey if they had their will, entirely misunderstand the temper of the English people. Not for nothing did England earn the standing epithet of "merry." We are by nature a jocund and a joyous people who like the picturesque incidents of a Royal progress as well as any race in the world. The outward

and visible pomps appeal to our sense of the fitness of things, and when they are omitted we are apt to grow gloomy and discontented. This the King recognises as well as any other man, for his eyes were not closed during his long period of probation as Prince of Wales, and he must have been well aware that the quite extraordinary hold which Queen Victoria had upon the affections of her people was obtained late in her life. Out of sight is out of mind, and the seclusion in which Queen Victoria lived during the early years of her widowhood undoubtedly weakened the position of the throne. It is only necessary to carry back one's mind to the sixties and the seventies or to read some of the memories and published letters of those days, to see that the last twenty years have brought about a most grateful change in the public tone concerning the Royal Family and thoughtful men are agreed that the improvement is directly traceable to a change of policy in relation to public appearances of which the 1887 Jubilee was the first and most splendid result.

We may take it that plenty of state pageants, evening courts, gorgeous levees, and so forth, are part of the deliberate policy of King Edward; and it is only necessary to watch him while he plays his part in public and to study the effect which his presence exercises over those who see him, in order to be convinced that this is a prudent policy. To be the central figure on great occasions, to be always interested, always sympathetic, is no easy task; but it is not too much to say that the King never fails in it and that each fresh occasion upon which he lays a foundation-stone or drives through avenues of his shouting subjects adds to the bulwark of warm affection which surrounds the throne. To sum up in a few words, then, King Edward is considerate, manly, strenuous, sympathetic, eminently sensible, a very human and representative Englishman of the best type. Long may he reign!