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THE CROWN

WHEN the curtain rises on the coronation it will be a curtain rising on a deep vista of history.

Not the least of the benefits of this ceremony is that life in the present takes on a profounder meaning in the larger context of time which its pageantry recalls.

The coronation is an act of the highest poetry in the Commonwealth's life, saddened on this occasion by the death in March of Queen Mary — widow of a King, mother of two Kings, and grandmother of the reigning Queen.

In relation to the Crown we are mystics. Our Queen is not a person exalted above us by Divine Right, nor a person of our own choosing. We have a part in her dignity, but she does not achieve that dignity at our will.

The Queen is the unimpeachable figure of all that is good in government; her crown is a symbol standing above creeds and parties. In a materialistic age, when the world is threatened by dangers never before known, the British Monarchy endures in noble strength. It is, in essence, the exaltation of dutiful example as opposed to the hazards of ruling by the mailed fist and the fleeting greatness of dictatorship.

One virtue in the coronation rites is that they are out of date. How could the stability and continuity of the national history be more impressively shown? Our Queen is crowned with the same ritual as that with which her predecessors have been crowned for more than a thousand years.

This is the oldest state ceremonial in Britain, and perhaps the oldest in the world. The first preserved ritual of an English coronation dates from the eighth century. There is one attributed to St. Dunstan, said to have been used by him at the coronation of King Ethelred in the year 978.

The forms are ancient, but the spirit embodied in them never grows old. That spirit is the solemn recognition of the sacred character alike of royalty and loyalty.

The Constitution

The coronation service epitomizes some salient features of the constitution, that unwritten constitution about which generations of philosophers, lawyers, historians and politicians have marvelled.

Our institutions, with all their unbroken historical continuity, are still extraordinarily flexible. A French writer remarked: "The English have left the different parts of their constitution just where the wave of history had deposited them." He might have carried on his metaphor by remarking that succeeding waves and ripples modify the constitution imperceptibly, so that only he who watches closely can detect changes or tell when and how they occur.

Out of all the beating of history on the shores of time has come for commonwealth countries the philosophy of responsible government: not representative government only, but that sort of responsible government which is given by an executive accountable to a parliamentary majority, bound to heed the advice it receives from parliament.

As head of such a government, the Queen has three rights, according to Walter Bagehot in his authoritative work *The English Constitution*. These rights are: the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn.

The acts, wishes and example of the sovereign are a real power in government. Parliaments and ministers pass, but the wearer of the Crown abides in life-long duty. W. E. Gladstone, who was four times Prime Minister of Britain, put it eloquently in his *Gleanings of Past Years*: "The Sovereign, as compared with her ministers, has, because she is the Sovereign, the advantages of long experience, wide survey, elevated position, and entire disconnection from the bias of party.

"There is not a doubt," Gladstone continued, "that the aggregate of direct influence normally exercised by the Sovereign upon the counsels and proceedings of her ministers is considerable in amount, tends to

permanence and solidity of action, and confers much benefit on the country without in the smallest degree relieving the advisers of the Crown from their individual responsibility."

Casual readers of history may think that the sovereignty of the Crown has been whittled down to the vanishing point, but apparent encroachments upon the Crown have added to its true dignity. The formal powers of the Crown under Queen Elizabeth II are virtually the same as those which belonged to it under Edward VI. The Queen is still the supreme executive authority; the Queen in Parliament is still the supreme legislative authority; the Queen is still the "fountain of honour" and the "fountain of justice"; the Queen is still commander of the military forces of the realm.

It is pointed out by J. A. R. Marriott in *English Political Institutions* that the monarch's judgment in foreign affairs is "ripened by a continuous experience of affairs, such as no minister can possibly, under our party system, hope to enjoy."

The Crown has a unifying function in home affairs. It often provides a golden bridge for retreat of a government from some hastily-conceived or injudicious bridgehead. Sir Charles Petrie says in *Monarchy in the Twentieth Century*, writing about the time when King George VI came to the throne: "on all sides there was a deplorable lack of unity; everywhere the politicians were stressing what keeps men apart rather than what brings them together, but King George VI saw to it that the Crown was at once the emblem and the hope of a more sane state of affairs."

In plain terms, the executive, represented by the Crown, is sufficiently strong to ensure the peace and order of society, and yet not sufficiently strong to disregard the wishes and happiness of the community.

The Queens of England

Wearing the Crown is no sinecure. It entails work. Queen Anne called herself "a crowned slave." And Shakespeare referred to the Crown in these words: "O polished perturbation! golden care! That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide to many a watchful night!"

The queens of England have not been the shadowy queens of tragedy or romance. In her mammoth work *Lives of the Queens of England*, published in 1853, Agnes Strickland tells the stories of 34 queens between the death of the last monarch of the Anglo-Saxon line, Edward the Confessor, in 1066, and the death of Queen Anne, last sovereign of the royal house of Stuart, in 1714. Thirty of these wore the crown-matrimonial as consorts, and four the regal diadem of the realm. Two more have been added as queens regnant — Victoria and Elizabeth II — and nine as consorts.

What changes are involved in the nearly 900 years spanned by the lives of these 45 women! Their reigns extend over the ages of feudalism, of chivalry and

romance, of splendour and misery, the crusades, the attempts to add the crown of France to that of England, the wars of the Roses, revolution, the rise of the parliamentary system.

The Commonwealth now has a new Queen, who comes to the throne, like Elizabeth I and Victoria, in the freshness and vigour of youth.

Her life up to now has given Queen Elizabeth II these advantages: a happy childhood, in which she was tended by parents free from the pressing duties of state; a liberal education, in the sense that it was not confined to insular points of view; and practical contact with the world, similar to that received by princes during their services with the armed forces.

She has much of her father's strong moral sense, it was pointed out by Hector Bolitho in the *British Vogue Export Book Supplement*, blended with her mother's charm. She has also something of Queen Victoria's will — "the will that made the old Queen declare to a minister: 'I was brought up to know what was right and what was wrong — never let me hear the word "expedient" again'."

The Rule of Law

The function of the Crown as the fountainhead of justice is one of its greatest virtues. No matter how elaborate the machinery of legislation and administration might be, the life of the individual citizen could be rendered miserable by any defect or delay in the administration of justice.

The Queen cannot at her pleasure alter the laws of the land, but in her coronation vow she sets the standard for all those who are charged with making and maintaining the law. The charge given her is in memorable words: "Be so merciful that you be not too remiss; so execute justice that you forget not mercy. Punish the wicked, protect and cherish the just, and lead your people in the way wherein they should go."

It took many centuries to mature the law which is administered under the Crown. Among the most notable advances were the Habeas Corpus Act which provided the necessary guarantees for safeguarding the individual, and the Act of Settlement, which took judges from under control of the executive and made them irremovable except on a joint address from both Houses of Parliament.

By these, and hundreds of minor gains, that rule of law was established which is still a pattern for the world. The forward march of legal processes may be traced in continuous line from King Alfred's *Dome-Book* or code of laws of the ninth century, and the laws and customs of these ten or eleven centuries have been absorbed into the lives of many countries.

Crown and Parliament

In government, the sovereign acts only upon the advice of constitutional advisers responsible to parliament. Herein is a paradox: while the powers of the

Crown have been increased, the power of the Crown has been curtailed. Marriott explains it by pointing to the development of an administrative system in which the chief officials, while nominally the servants of the Queen, are in reality politically responsible to Parliament.

The most significant clause in the Grand Remonstrance of 1641 required the King to choose counsellors and ministers in whom Parliament had confidence.

Eight years later, the Rump of the Long Parliament passed an Act abolishing the office of king. By 1688 a compromise had been reached: the king continued to reign, but he ceased to rule. Sir John Eliot, who died for his views on parliamentary independence a half-century earlier, had said pithily: "Parliament is the body: the King is the spirit."

There may have been fits of absent-mindedness in the long course of development of relations between the Crown and Parliament, but the British have followed a shrewd political sense that showed itself even in the earliest historical times. The British system of government strikes its roots so deep into the past that scarcely a feature of its proceedings and powers can be made intelligible without reference to history, and yet the end result is an institution fitting perfectly the temper of the times and the needs of the people.

Crown and Commonwealth

The Crown has acquired overwhelming significance as the core and symbol of Commonwealth unity.

The formal centralizing institutions of the Empire have disappeared one by one as Empire developed into Commonwealth, but the status of the Crown has been progressively exalted. Last year saw variety introduced into the Queen's titles, but the Crown's unique unifying influence remains.

The parliamentary institutions of the commonwealth countries are the guarantee of democratic strength, and it is a tremendous stabilizing influence to have at the head of these institutions a monarch who is independent of, and outside, politics.

It was under the Crown that Britain's free institutions were born and brought up. Magna Charta, signed five hundred and eighty years before the liberty vaunting French Revolution, was, it is true, a forced concession. But it did not shatter the Crown, only certain arbitrary powers then exercised by kings under the Crown.

As things stand today, the Commonwealth is an association of people, as well as of countries. There are spiritual, psychological and intellectual forces drawing them together despite their differences of race, religion, language, literature, law and economic influences.

The prime ministers of the Commonwealth who assembled in London in January, 1951, were guilty of no exaggeration when they said that this historic Commonwealth, under the Crown, is "singularly well constituted to enable it to study and in some measure to comprehend the vexed questions which beset the world."

Unity in Diversity

Broadening of the Commonwealth, by inclusion of republics for example, does not diminish but rather enhances the importance of the symbolism which indicates its sense of unity and common purpose.

The Commonwealth has no spider-web of contractual relations. It is held in no parchment bonds or hard steel shackles. The unique relation of the Crown to all the self-governing nations, the republics, the territories and the colonies, makes possible their equality of status and enables them to advance in self-government without violent constitutional changes.

Strange it is to people not of the Commonwealth to realize that here is a galaxy of nations which functions without a central constitution or executive authority. Its binding force is loyalty to a Crown, and it is so cohesive that this Commonwealth, alone in the world's history, has dared to decentralize three powers which were always before jealously guarded and tenaciously held by central authority: framing tariffs, controlling immigration, and creating and maintaining navies.

In a moving address that won applause from all parties in the House of Commons in February, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent hailed the Commonwealth as "an effective instrument for the good of free mankind throughout the whole world."

He was speaking to a bill changing the Royal Style and Titles for use in Canada, under which the Queen becomes "Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom, Canada, and Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith."

This bill results from the Prime Ministers' conference last year, when it was agreed that each member of the Commonwealth should use the form of title it decided to be most suitable. What mattered at that conference was that the Commonwealth should continue to display vigour and vitality in adapting itself to new situations. As Nicholas Mansergh said in a recent issue of the *Westminster Bank Review*: "Had its Prime Ministers adhered to customary and conventional usage they would in fact have set a limit to the development of the Commonwealth."

Diversity in Unity

An American ambassador called the British Empire "a school of government that inevitably leads to self-government." On the way up the ladder from dependency to nation, there is great diversity.

The principle underlying the diversity in forms of government which we see today is that government should be adapted to the conditions, the needs and the stage of political development of the people in each particular state or territory.

Whatever its present condition politically, in every country of the Commonwealth there have been planted seeds of freedom, civilization and culture. To every country under the Crown have been carried free institutions and the rule of law.

It is manifest that strong national feeling is not incompatible with free association under the Crown. This was nowhere more clearly shown than in the case of India. About to become a republic, that country positively expressed a desire to remain a full member of the Commonwealth.

A new concept was born six years ago when Canada took the lead in enacting legislation from which, Mr. Mansergh points out, a new pattern of citizenship derived. The British Nationality Act of 1948 endorsed the new conception, in which the emphasis had shifted from a fundamental common status to fundamental national citizenships. The common status of Commonwealth citizen was thereafter to be derived from individual national citizenship, so that a Canadian was to be a Commonwealth citizen because he was a Canadian, and not, as formerly, a Canadian because he was a British subject.

Every development like this has brought forth lamentations from some who see in it a sign of disintegration. Sceptics viewed in this way the Statute of Westminster, which gave the Dominions status as free and independent nations. It was far from being anything of the sort.

As John Drinkwater wrote under the title *The King's Majesty* in the Jubilee Trust Coronation Souvenir Programme in 1937: "It was as fine an achievement of imaginative statesmanship as any that the modern world has seen. This association of free peoples was, as has been well said, 'a league of nations, with an unwritten, yet inviolable covenant, making peace certain for a very considerable section of the world.' That inviolability is proclaimed in a specific reference in the Statute: 'the Crown is the symbol of the free association of the members of the British Commonwealth of Nations, and . . . they are united by a common allegiance to the Crown'."

Those noble words mean that in their free association these commonwealth countries look to the Queen, each with the right of direct appeal, and through the Crown they proclaim their brotherhood. "It is," said Drinkwater, "a majestic conception, and it has a unique spiritual sanction in the world of politics."

The Crown and the U.S.A.

All the world has a part in the past which is brought to life by the coronation, but most of all the Western world. Viscount Bryce, one time British ambassador in Washington, wrote to his friend John F. Jameson of the Carnegie Institution: ". . . the singular fact that

the semi-educated don't seem to realize [is] that the history of the United States before the eighteenth century, and, to a considerable extent, down to 1776, is the history of England."

It was from Britain that the colonists carried their bias in favour of freedom, and it was upon a British base that the political liberties of the world have been built.

In a booklet published to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the inauguration of the first president of the United States, Dr. John C. Fitzpatrick said this: "The Englishman's understanding of liberty had been woven into his being by the struggle through the centuries; it was the most precious possession brought to America by the first English colonists."

The peoples of the English-speaking democracies have a great advantage in their common heritage. The legacy of political ideas and practical co-operation is not alone to the commonwealth countries but to many where the Queen's writ does not run.

No Decadence Here

Those who visit Britain for the coronation will see a country dotted with war wreckage, but they will see roses amid the ruins. They will be impressed by the way participants from all the Commonwealth seem to say through the coronation ceremony, in the mood of Fitz-James in Scott's *Lady of the Lake*: "Come on Future; we've our back against the Past!"

Today, the Royal Crown encircles not only the ancient glories of a particular people, but the hope and promise of a broadening life for hundreds of millions of others.

The Commonwealth over which the Queen reigns is far from perfect, but it is being constantly improved because of criticism by its own people through their legislatures, their press and their institutions. Throughout all its affairs blows the cleansing wind of democracy, based on freedom of speech, of religion, of the press and of association.

Having dedicated herself to maintenance of these freedoms, the Queen will receive the Crown. She will receive it, as it is given, in a spirit free from ancient grudges, as the symbol of her unity with her people, and as an emblem of the unity of her people.

The Queen's duties will be formally assumed in an atmosphere of dignity, and her people will partake in the dignity with her, conscious of the tremendous past embraced and mirrored in the brief coronation ceremony, and of the high hope they hold for peace and advancement during this reign.

The British, said Comte Serge Fleury, remind us of those personages the Renaissance artists show posed on walls and in paintings — "figures draped in gorgeous mantles, stepping slowly forward, as if they knew they had eternity ahead of them in which to realize their important schemes. They walk straight ahead, guided in full night by stars that belong to them alone."