

# CORONATION YEAR

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THIS is Coronation Year, and there are only two topics of conversation in Britain to-day. The first is the approaching Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth; the second is rearmament. In popular interest, the first far outweighs the second. The Coronation is in everybody's newspaper and on everybody's lips. Coronation souvenirs are on sale in all the big shops; Coronation patterns are appearing in women's dress. In London, where stands for spectators are already disfiguring the green oases, the subject is brought to every eye as well as to every ear. It says much for the magnanimity—or is it merely the stolidity?—of the British people that they are looking forward to the Coronation and its attendant ceremonies as to a grand, harmonious party. There is one small discordant voice on the extreme Left, where the *Daily Worker*, its prestige recently enhanced by the excellence of its news service from the Spanish battle front, persists in discovering a scandal of working conditions behind every Coronation mug and every Coronation celebration. Elsewhere, there is general approval. The Government is doing its best to give every side of national activity a share in the national ceremony, even if the share is only that of a spectator. Government departments are working together with the police to avoid any of the unhappy accidents which have marred some recent royal occasions. Semi-official and unofficial bodies are preparing to entertain the unknown number of visitors from overseas, and a Coronation Accommodation Committee is planning to house them. Even Mr. De Valera has so far forgotten to trail his coat as to approve the crowning of the King as Governor of "the peoples of Great Britain, Ireland, Canada. . .". The honest traders of London are looking forward to May with a pleasure not undeserved, and the profiteering kind have been rapped over the knuckles twice, first by the Government's provision of cheap seats for spectators along the route of the Coronation Procession, secondly by the Coronation Accommodation Committee's refusal to allow more than a ten per cent increase over normal prices for rooms.

In the midst of these preparations, one notable figure has passed into virtual oblivion. The Duke of Windsor, lately "His Most Excellent Majesty Edward VIII, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, Ireland, and of the British Dominions beyond

the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India", is still accounted of sufficient public interest for his minor movements to be chronicled on the front pages of the more popular newspapers. But the popular newspapers misjudge public interest in this respect as much as the less popular newspapers misjudged public opinion over Edward VIII's abdication. The full story of the abdication cannot yet be written, and may never be written. For it is not yet known, and may never be known, what other motives actuated the principal characters in the drama in addition to the motives which they publicly admitted. Was the King, for example, planning to "do something" for the unemployed which Mr. Baldwin did not like? Was there a scheme for a monarchical dictatorship? Was there any truth in the rumours, to which the useful Mr. Gallacher gave expression on the floor of the House of Commons, about the close relations between some members of the King's entourage and "a foreign Power"? Was the abdication due to thoughtlessly tactless handling of a difficult situation? Does Mr. Baldwin's well known physical resemblance to Oliver Cromwell reflect a spiritual resemblance which found expression last November? All these questions must be answered before the full story can be told; and in the meantime the story as told in the newspapers is as misleading as anything well could be. In that eventful week of December, the most reputable newspapers were wholeheartedly with the Government; the less reputable, and along with them some very dubious parties and individuals, were with the King. It might be assumed therefrom that the decent body of British citizens was unanimously on the side of the Government also. The assumption would be far from correct. Edward VIII's abdication aroused such intense interest as no other event in British history has aroused this century. It was fiercely debated in nine out of every ten London homes. It would not be far from the truth to say that in three out of every nine of those homes the preponderance of opinion was on the King's side. The reason lay partly in changing ideas about divorce, and partly in the attractive character of the man chiefly concerned. It lay much more—paradoxical as this may sound, in view of the anything but libertarian nature of some of the King's supporters—in a feeling that individual liberty was being outraged, that the Government was unwarrantably attempting to control the King's private life. It was reinforced by the revolt, which has been steadily growing since the War, against the shameless hypocrisy of a system which allows a man to live with a woman in what is called sin, but would not allow him to live with her in marriage.

These were obviously not the only considerations which moved either Cabinet or King. If, however, a true social history of the brief reign of Edward VIII is to be written, they must not be forgotten. They are as much a part of it as the stories and verses which were privately circulated last December. They explain why the Archbishop of Canterbury's call to a religious revival, supported since then by the parallel celebration of the Moody Centenary, has fallen on stony ground. For good or ill, the Church of England has lost caste. So have the newspapers, whose unwonted silence on a matter of public interest made it possible for the Government, as many think, to "spring a surprise" on the people.

The monarchy has not lost caste; and that is in great part due to the character of the man who has now come to the Throne. While Archbishops and others were flinging mud at a man who had been virtually expelled the country—

My Lord Archbishop, what a scold you are!  
And when your man is down, how very bold you are!

says one of the verses referred to above—he "nothing common did nor mean." His only references to his brother were friendly, and that reconciled the resentful—a class which included many people who are indifferent whether the form of the state be republic or monarchy. The fact that he was happily married ensured him in advance the support of the others. It is too early yet to predict what his reign will bring. If the character which he has already shown is a guide, it seems not unlikely to rival that of his father.

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"War was never so execrated and never so expected", said the Socialist *Daily Herald* in writing of rearmament plans last month. The latter statement is indisputable, the former only a half-truth. It is now nearly twenty years since the last war in which Britain was engaged. Since then, Continental armies have grown to formidable dimensions. Since then, and especially in the past two years, the pacific spirit of the British people has unmistakably declined. In a limited sense, it is still true to say that nobody in Britain wants war. But the British people have become used to the idea of war, and would certainly not now consider it the worst of all evils. Conservatives and Isolationists would rather go to war than surrender an inch of the territory gained in 1918. Liberals and mild-Socialists would go to war

for the sake of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Communists and extreme Socialists would go to war against Fascism. Together their fears, their hopes, and their desires make a formidable chorus, drowning the voices of the few pure pacifists among us. On the other side of the fence, Signor Mussolini is continually calling millions of men to the colours—

“I can call spirits from the vasty deep”—

“Aye, but will they come when you do call them?”—

and proclaiming himself protector of the Arab peoples, some of whom live in Palestine. Herr Hitler's lieutenants are continually demanding return of the German colonies. And in Spain, Germans, Italians, Russians and Frenchmen are testing their new weapons against the Spaniards and each other. In such a situation rearmament becomes inevitable; and, indeed, it is accepted as such by every party in Britain. Though the Socialists have voted against defence estimates, they have done so, not because they object to armaments, but because they have no assurance as to the use to which these armaments are to be put. So the race towards disaster goes on. Is disaster its only possible outcome? Not in the opinion of many people in Britain. They believe—and the Government is thought to be with them in this—that if only Britain arms fast, and fast enough, the other Great Powers will be forced to call a halt for want of resources. Then, they say, will be the time to talk disarmament; not until then can there be any serious hope of future peace. It sounds rather like a game of poker, with human lives as chips; and in some quarters it has been accepted in the poker spirit. Mr. Chamberlain, it is there said, is bluffing. He does not intend to spend the £1,500,000,000 he has announced as necessary for rearmament over the next five years. He could not spend it on rearmament if he would. There is probably not enough raw material at present available. If the raw material were there, there is not enough skilled labour to use it. Now it is true that at the moment the necessary skilled labour is lacking. For, although serious unemployment continues, it is precisely in the heavy industries—which are the nearest akin to the armament industries—that unemployment is least. But to conclude from this that Mr. Chamberlain is bluffing is to misjudge the character of the man. As it is now generally agreed that he will succeed Mr. Baldwin in the Premiership in May, it is worth while to consider what that character is.

“Chamberlain” was a name to conjure with in British politics two generations ago. Neville Chamberlain may make it a notable

name again. If he does so, it will be in a manner entirely different from that of his father. Joseph Chamberlain wore an orchid and a monocle. Neville Chamberlain wears neither one nor the other. The difference in dress is symptomatic of a difference in character. Where Joseph Chamberlain dreamed romantic dreams, Neville Chamberlain carries out practical plans. By nature he is an administrator, and training has reinforced nature. From business and local politics in Birmingham, he passed in 1918 to Parliament. The reputation he has made there is perhaps less than the reputation he has made in Whitehall. It is said that, when Mr. Baldwin was undecided whether he should send him to the Treasury or to the Ministry of Health, officials of the Ministry offered a prayer that he might be given to them. He was. As Minister, he had to carry through some of the most controversial measures of the time, among them various housing schemes and the Derating Act. He did so with the assurance of a man master of his subject, skilled to defend it, convinced that his path was the right one. The same knowledge, skill and conviction have been maintained in his Chancellorship of the Exchequer, which he has now held for over six years. This has enabled him to carry through with ease tariff changes which were a reversal of traditional British policy. It has enabled him, after coming into National Government office on the cry "Balance the Budget", to inaugurate a policy which must unbalance the Budget. In all this time, and in his several offices, he has never made any mistake—his own particular point of view once granted. That does not mean, however, that he has not been subject to criticism. He has. He has frequently—and probably unjustly—been accused of callousness. He has often been told that his Budgets are "business man's budgets"; and to realise what strong criticism that implies, it is necessary to understand the slight esteem in which "business" here is held by comparison with productive activities and the public services. But the one defect with which he has never been charged is "bluffing". In a recent debate in Parliament on the Distressed Areas, he declared that he detested "humbug" in politics. His every act bears witness to the detestation.

Such is the man who has embarked Britain on a stupendous rearmament programme. Such is the man who, whether as Chancellor of the Exchequer or as Prime Minister, will carry the programme through. Remembering the man, it behoves us to treat his plans seriously. They are serious enough, in all conscience. At worst, they will end—not necessarily of Britain's volition—in a war the like of which has never yet been seen. At best, they may

bring a trade depression much greater than that which began in 1929. Doubts about an armament "boom" were expressed in this correspondence a year ago. With armament expenditure multiplied, as it has recently been multiplied, doubts have given way to certainties. "Boom" conditions are almost here. In the short run, they may do some little good. At any rate, the Government is relying on them to provide an effectual solution to the problem of the Distressed Areas. In the long run, they may do much harm. Apart from the fact that the only dividend a gun can pay is a dividend in human life, there is, as the inescapable consequence of rapid rearmament, a huge vested interest in process of creation in the armament industries. The fact that it is a vested interest of labour as well as of capital does not alter its nature. Labourers no more like losing their jobs than capitalists like losing their profits. Yet, without war, the armaments "boom" must some day end, and capital and labour must that day lose. The result will inevitably be, on the one hand social and political unrest, on the other hand complete dislocation of the economic system. These economic consequences of Mr. Chamberlain have been foreseen, will probably be foreseen by Mr. Chamberlain himself; and some antidotes, such as postponement of public works until rearmament is ended, have already been suggested. But the suggestion will hardly be acceptable to a nation which becomes steadily more determined to extend the State's work; and it could not in any case make any appreciable difference.

The outlook, in fact, remains gloomy. Yet it is not without its humorous aspects. One of them is provided by population. For a good many years now, English scientists, and notably Professor Carr-Saunders, have been predicting that by the middle of this century Britain's population will be on the decline. Their predictions at first went unnoticed, or, when noticed, were welcomed as giving hope that the Britain of the future might be a more rational and more manageable world. But, now that the Britain of the future will clearly be more irrational and more unmanageable, the scientists' predictions are being received with consternation. British citizens are being urged to breed more babies. Fathers are more honoured than they were. There is even talk of a tax on bachelors. And—so rapidly does mankind forget, so illogically do its ideas change—none, either to Right or to Left, cries, "Cannon fodder!"

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