

Stability of the British Empire Again Formally Exemplified When ENGLAND CROWNS the SIXTH GEORGE

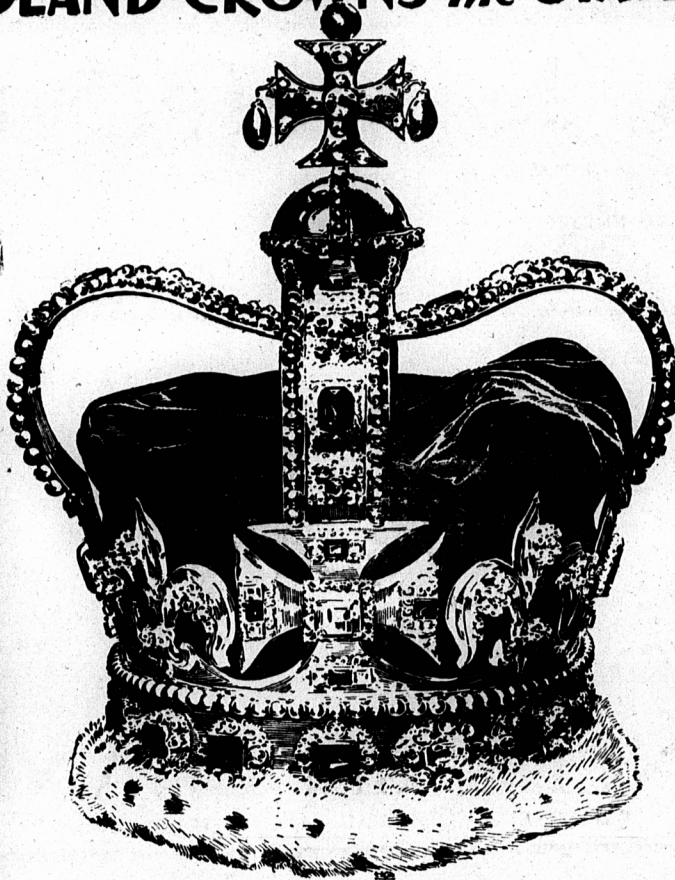
By Bruce Catton

"SIRS, I here present unto you King George, the undoubted king of this realm. Wherefore all of you who are come this day to do your homage and service, are you willing to do the same?"

On the 12th of May the Archbishop of Canterbury, standing in Westminster Abbey, will call out these words four times, facing to the four points of the compass by turn; and as he does so the ancient ceremony that formally invests George VI with the crown of England will come to its colorful climax.

In all the world, there is no more gaudy show than the coronation of a British king.

From the ends of the earth come the



A sketch of the great crown which will be placed on the king's head during the coronation ceremonies, flanked by photos of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

announced that she was going to be crowned queen. She actually showed up at the door of Westminster Abbey on coronation day in coach and six, but was denied admittance on the ground that she did not have a ticket. She gave up her attempt, left London, and died a year or so later.

George IV was true to type even during the coronation ceremonies. The chapel of St. Edward, one of the most tradition-haunted spots in historic Westminster Abbey, was turned into a bar and stocked with sandwiches and drink; from time to time, during the four-hour ceremonies, George calmly absented himself and repaired to the chapel for refreshment, with everything at a standstill until he returned.



come into prominence in the turbulent 17th century.

George I was a German, elector of Hanover when summoned to the English throne. To the end of his life he never learned to speak English.

There were stirring events aplenty in his reign. A Jacobite conspiracy flared up in 1715, to die when half a dozen noblemen were executed. Another uprising came four years later, with Spanish troops landing on the west coast of Scotland to proclaim a Stuart king. Like the first, it was beaten down, not without bloodshed. The great South Sea Bubble—that 18th century forerunner of Florida land boom and 1929 stock market spurge—burst midway in George's reign, with effects like those of the 1929 crash.

George I seems to have exerted singularly little influence in the midst of all this. His job was simply to exist, as a living barrier to the return of the Stuarts; he did this well enough until 1727, when he died and left the throne to his son, King George II.

England was slowly turning from an agricultural economy to an industrial. Dispossessed from the land, people were flocking to the capital. Poverty and crime were probably more prevalent in England then than ever before or since.

However that may be, George II lived through it stolidly, his chief interest being a series of family quarrels. He and his wife, Queen Caroline, became bitterly estranged from their son, Frederick, heir apparent to the throne.

Frederick died before his father; and when George II dropped dead in 1760, his grandson ascended the throne as George III.

THIS particular George, of course, stands in the black books of most historians as the monarch who, by a singular blend of tyranny and stupidity, managed to bring on the American revolution and lose for the empire what would have become its richest possession; and yet, as a matter of fact, he stands in rather refreshing contrast to the two Georges who preceded him and the one who succeeded him.

They had been great drinkers and wenchers; George III was temperate and well-behaved to the point of prudery. They largely ignored statecraft; George III followed his strict sense of duty and revived the direct influence of the crown in British affairs. And if England won Canada under George II and lost America under George III, it was largely because George II was served by a great statesman in Chatham while George III was served by a great blockhead in Lord North.

George III was probably as unlucky a monarch as England ever had. He had the American revolution to contend with. It was followed by a sharp wave of discontent at home. After that came the French revolution, unsettling to monarchs everywhere, and Napoleon, who was even more unsettling.

To top it all, this king fathered one of the greatest blackguards who ever ascended to a throne—the Prince of Wales who was long known as "the first gentleman of Europe" and who later became King George IV. At 23 this incredible prince had managed to run up debts of £60,000 pounds. Between 1784 and 1788, it is recorded, he spent no less than \$69,000 pounds. And in 1785 the prince jarred the empire by marrying a Roman Catholic widow, Mrs. Fitzherbert. Needless to say, this marriage was very soon dissolved.

George III became permanently insane in 1810, and his son was made regent. Luckily, the son (afterward George IV) had a succession of able statesmen to guide the ship of state for him. His own time was pretty largely taken up with a bitter fight with his wife, Queen Caroline.

George IV was crowned in 1820, after the death of his luckless father. Caroline, who had been living abroad for some time, returned to England and

NEVERTHELESS, he seems to have discovered a long-dormant sense of responsibility on attaining the throne. He did much to re-establish the bonds between England and Scotland by making a personal tour of the latter country, and in similar fashions he actually brought about temporary harmony with Ireland. He died in 1830, having been a more useful king than anyone had dared to expect.

George V was crowned in 1910. He was a quiet, unostentatious man, who had been the second son of Edward VII and had hoped to make a career as naval officer.

Under George V the British empire passed through one of the most trying periods in its history; and simply because he was ideally fitted to stand as a symbol of British character at its best, a rallying point for the hopes and the loyalty of the empire's peoples, George V did a great deal to bring the empire through intact.

The World War was fought in his reign, straining the empire almost to the breaking point. The period of post-war confusion saw throne after throne go down—but not England's.

An odd little fact stands out, in connection with the death of George V. He was succeeded by one of the two uncrowned kings in all British history, Edward VIII, who abdicated before his coronation. The other uncrowned king was also an Edward—Edward V, the boy king who was locked up in the Tower of London and there murdered.

At any rate, the British will very shortly be crowning their sixth King George; and, to repeat, no one can observe the spectacle without looking to the future and trying to guess what fate may have in store for the serious, studious man who now reigns.

witnesses—princes of India, representatives of the great dominions, admirals and generals, peers of the realm, nobles and commons—and the ceremony itself is made up of echoes of the long history of England. The cry of the archbishop is a reminder of that far-off day when the Anglo-Saxons elected their kings; the anointing of the new king reaches back into the dim days of legend; the very names of the functionaries descend from the days of chivalry, and read like a paragraph from the description of the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

The great jeweled crown is finally held high, for all to see; then it is placed on the king's head, a cry of "God save the king!" rings through the historic abbey, and the guns of the Tower of London thunder over their announcement that the rite has been completed.

And as the event is recorded, people of the English-speaking world will find themselves looking in two directions: forward, to speculate on what will happen to the new king, and to the people whose crown he wears, in the troublous years just ahead; and backward, to examine the records of the other Georges who have worn the English crown.

WITH George I, crowned in 1714, England got a new dynasty, the House of Hanover replacing the House of Stuart. It was a time of change and confusion; Cromwell was still a vivid memory, the Jacobites were hatching plots innumerable for the "king over the water," and the 6,500,000 people who inhabited the kingdom were witnessing the slow rise of the middle class, the decline of the lower class, and the transfer of power from the great old families to the new ones which had

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