

The Biography of His Majesty—KING GEORGE V.—By Major C. F. L. Kipling

STRIFE AND SORROW GREET KING CULMINATING IN WORLD WAR

CHAPTER 12

New sovereign does all in his power to avert terrible disaster, but when Belgian King appeals, he says to American Ambassador, "My God, what else can we do but go in?"

In this chapter of the life of King George V, Major Kipling tells of the ever darkening shadows leading up to the War—of the trouble in India and Ireland and how the sovereign traveled to both countries in a vain effort to quieten disturbance.

By Major C. F. L. Kipling (Copyright 1930)

King George had ascended the throne in the middle of one of the greatest constitutional crises of modern times, brought about by the rejection in the House of Lords of Mr. Lloyd George's Budget, which for the first time, imposed direct taxes on land.

The outcome of this was the 'Parliament Bill' to limit the power of Lords, by decreeing that Money Bills which failed to pass them should receive the Royal Assent at the end of the session in which they were brought in, and that all other Bills on their third rejection by the Lords, should receive the Royal Assent and become law.

King Edward had been told by Mr. Asquith the Prime Minister, that this government would stand or fall by the Parliament Bill, but that, before going to the country on this question, they asked for a guarantee from the King that if the electors returned them, the Royal prerogative would be exercised to create a sufficient number of peers to pass the Bill through the Lords. The King answered, as we know on the authority of Lord Haldane, that he would be prepared to accept the verdict of the people, but in the meantime, he tried in every way to bring the party leaders together, although with no success.

It was at this stage of the crisis that King Edward died, and it was left to the new King to meet the perplexing and dangerous situation, and

to meet it constitutionally and impartially as has been his way always. It cannot have been anything but exceedingly difficult for him to come to the conclusion which was announced on the eve of the General Election of November 1910 that the King "felt he had no alternative but to assent to the advice of the Cabinet" and that he would "be ready to exercise his constitutional powers which may involve the prerogative of the decision of the country."

The necessity did not arise. When the Bill was again sent back to the Lords, when Lord Morley, for the Ministry, warned the House that, if the Bill was not passed, the King would definitely assent to the creation of a huge number of peers, the Unionist leaders, Lord Curzon and Lord Lansdowne, advised their party to submit to 'force majeure' and the Bill was passed by a small majority.

For the first time, internal tension was less acute, but, almost simultaneously, the King and his Ministers had to face the possibility of serious political danger on the Continent. That summer of 1911 was abnormally hot, a time of trade strikes and of a low rumbling of the distant thunder of war. How near war with Germany was at that time, the people did not fully realize until the danger was for the moment averted. But there were rumors more or less definite; the cancelling of the Army Manoeuvres, unusual fleet movements, following on the unwarranted despatch of the German warship "Panther" to Agadir in Morocco, which necessitated a very stern warning from England—a warning that if France was willfully attacked, England would be reckoned with. The warning served its purpose; Germany hastened to explain away the "Panther" incident and to declare that she had meant nothing aggressive, but the incident had left an increased feeling of insecurity, an increased sense among those who were farseeing that the strain was only temporarily relaxed.

And now the time was approaching for that voyage which was to be the culmination of the Coronation ceremonies. The King had announced his intentions to the Parlia-

ment which had met in the preceding February—an intention which had startled some people by its very unexpectedness.

It was ninety years since a British sovereign had visited any part of his Dominions overseas—and then it had only been a question of a continental tour to Hanover. King George now purposed to "celebrate in his Indian Dominions the solemnity of the Coronation," to be proclaimed in person, and in full Durbar, Emperor of India and to receive personally the homage of his Indian Subjects. King George has sometimes been accused of a certain lack of imagination, of that sense of the dramatic which his father displayed so strongly. In planning himself this great State visit to India, he showed that he could imagine as vividly any other the impense effect which such a visit would have in consolidating the loyalty of that vast overseas Empire.

The King and Queen could not leave the country together without providing fully for its government, especially as the Prince of Wales was not yet of age. This was done by appointing Counsellors of State, in the persons of Prince Arthur of Connaught, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Chancellor with the Lord President of the Council, these last being Lord Loreburn and Lord Morley. They were given power to do anything which seemed to them necessary, on King George's behalf, for the safety and for the good of the realm, except that they might not create peers or dissolve Parliament. But, as a matter of fact, the ministers were in daily communication with the King by telegraph, and he was consulted on all important matters.

On November 11th, 1911—a date which was to become even more momentous later in the reign of King George—the King and Queen set out from Portsmouth in the P. and O. steamer, "Medina", manned, as the "Ophir" had been, by the naval officers and seamen. There was an escort of battleships, the "Cochrane", "Defence", "Argyll", and "Natal", all under Rear-Admiral Sir Colin Keppel.

It was a wonderful voyage, the prelude to a wonderful tour. At Port Said the Khedive came to visit the

King on board the "Medina" and the King returned the visit to the Khedive's state yacht, while he was expected to meet and consult Lord Kitchener, who had just become Agent-General in Egypt, and learn how affairs went there.

On December 2nd, the "Medina" arrived at Bombay, to be met by Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, and escorted ashore later in the day to a city gorgeously decorated with all the brilliant colorings of the East. That Eastern splendor accompanied the Royal party all through the tour, but it reached its culmination in the great Durbar at Delhi, probably one of the most magnificent spectacles in the history of the world, when all the ruling Princes and Chieftains of India, vying with each other in the splendor of their persons and their suites, came to do homage to the King Emperor and his consort, sitting crowned and in Royal robes on the thrones of the dais.

It was a wonderful moment when the Proclamation was made by the Chief Herald, when the thunder of guns and the silver voices of trumpets and the cheers of countless people, white and brown, saluted the Sovereign. And in another way, a still more striking moment followed, when the King himself read loudly and clearly the words in which were expressed a decision which had, up till then, been a complete secret, even from such officials as Lord Curzon, the ex-Viceroy. The capital of India was to be transferred from Calcutta to Delhi—from the new town Bengal to the ancient city, which had always held historically the highest place in Indian tradition. It was a change immensely popular in India, although in England it caused a certain amount of dissatisfaction.

The foundation-stones of the new Delhi, the new capital, were laid during the Royal visit, and other magnificent ceremonies took place, especially a great review of troops, British and Indian, one of the most impressive sights imaginable. At an investiture which was held that evening when several thousand people were assembled in a great tent, in the centre of the vast Imperial camp, an incident occurred which might have led to terrible consequences. Those to be invested were passing before the King whilst the Queen, wearing the pale blue of the Star of India Order, was seated beside him, when suddenly there was a cry of: "Fire!"

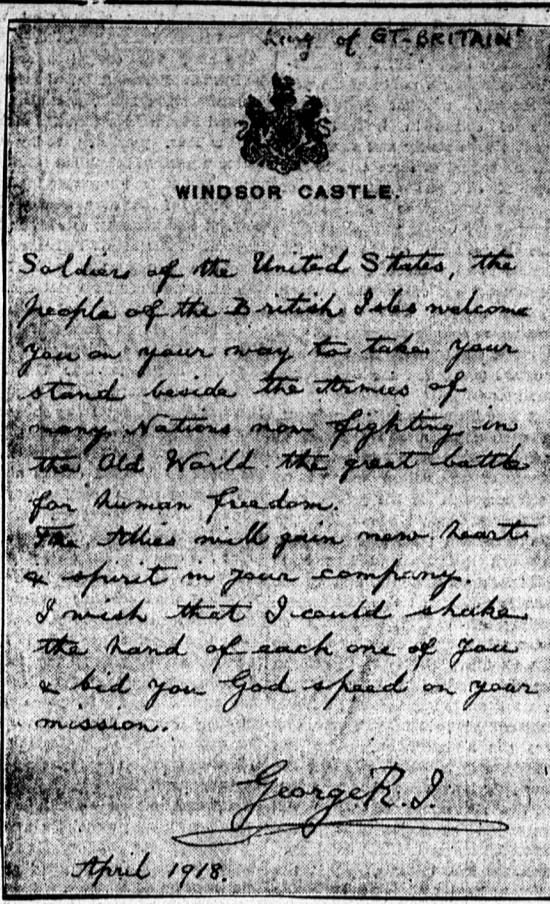
Always horrifying, such an alarm is intensified when a camp is in question, with the inflammability of the tents and marquees. There was something very like a panic amongst a certain section of the close-packed crowd—but the King and Queen remained absolutely unmoved, showing as always that unshakable personal courage which we have come to expect of our Royal Family as a matter of course. It was no false alarm: a tent only a hundred yards or so away had caught fire, and except for the promptitude of the action taken, it might well have spread further.

It was a crowded week of pageants and State functions, and at the conclusion of one of them the people of Bengal showed pathetically and beautifully, the spirit which the visit of their ruler had waked in them. It was after the King had left pavilion at a great historical display that the crowd broke off, sweeping past soldiers and police, surrounding the place where the King-Emperor had been standing, and catching up the dust and the earth which his feet had trodden to lay it in homage on their foreheads.

The return to England was saddened by the news of the death of the Duke of Fife, and at once the King was immersed in the tangle of foreign politics, complicated at the moment by the troubles in the Balkans, where Serbia and Bulgaria were just about to sign an alliance, which made the great Powers of Europe uneasy. One of the King's first acts on his return was to bestow the Order of the Garter on Sir Edward Grey in recognition of his services during the dangerous crisis of the year before, and during this spring the bonds of the Entente with France, which King Edward had so largely brought about, were drawn closer by his son.

There were great reviews of the Fleet and the Army that summer of 1921, and Manoeuvres which were especially important, if only for the fact that it was the occasion on which the King first met intimately that great figure of the future, General Ferdinand Foch, who came to England as the military representative of France on this occasion and delighted the King by his praise of English soldiers. Between the English Sovereign and the French soldier, who, together, were to share later such appalling responsibilities, a very real friendship began that summer.

In May of 1913, there was a family gathering at Berlin on the occasion of the wedding of the Kaiser's daughter to the son of the Duke of Gumb-



KING GEORGE'S ANSWER TO U.S.

The facsimile shown above speaks for itself. It is the personal note in the Guardian the biographer tells which King George sent to the American Army on the latter's entry into the war. In the biography of the

berland, King George and the Tsar were both invited and both accepted the invitation, in the hope that the strain and stress of foreign relations might be lessened—a result which certainly, for the moment, seemed to be attained. There was an atmosphere of kindness and peaceableness over the whole of the proceedings, which gave many people hope for the future, even although they might see in it only one of the Kaiser's impulsively emotional moods. A very successful State visit of President Poincaré to England followed during the summer, and in the spring of 1914 this visit was returned by the King and Queen—a visit which was brilliant in the extreme, and roused great enthusiasm amongst the Parisians. Yet under the sunshine of those April days there was a growing uneasiness and disquiet. The Russian Ambassador had been urgently begging President Poincaré to further the idea of a naval alliance between Great Britain, France and his own country, explaining the

Tsar's intense desire that something of the kind might be concluded. The Triple Alliance was regarded as a threat to the peace of Europe on the part of Germany, Austria, and Italy. A Triple Entente might ease the strain. The King, approached on the matter, said frankly that he thought some kind of naval understanding would be a very good thing—and referred the President and the Russian Ambassador to Sir Edward Grey for further discussion.

Foreign politics, indeed, at the moment, were less in the King's thoughts most likely than domestic matters. It had been noticed that even during the gaieties of Paris, King George was depressed and preoccupied to some extent; the problem of Ireland, the threat of civil strife was pressing upon him more and more heavily—the sense of impotence which the state of Ireland has so often imposed upon her rulers. President Poincaré tells in his diary how the King seemed oppressed by these things, how he exclaimed forcibly that he would not allow civil war to break out, and that he had not the powers which the Conservatives accused him of failing to exercise.

It is evident that increasing pressure was being brought to bear upon the King, for now the moment was approaching when Asquith's Home Rule Bill, by passing through the Commons three times, had reached the point when the King's assent to it might be demanded, irrespective of the intense opposition in the House of Lords. This Bill created a single Parliament for Ireland, although with no authority over the Army, Navy, peace or war—far less power, of course, than the post-war treaty gave the new Dominion. But at the same time, it called out the bitterest opposition, and in spite of the fact that Ulster was to be allowed to cut herself off, for a period, from the new arrangement, Ulster was determined on nothing less than civil war, whilst both parties in Ireland were gunning and drilling almost openly.

It was a most serious position, and, for the King, a very tragic one. According to the constitutional law of the country, he was undoubtedly bound to act on the advice of his ministers, the Liberal Government who were bent on carrying through the Bill. According to the Conservative view, he might dissolve Parliament and thus force the Government

to go to the country on a question which, according to the Conservatives would see their inevitable defeat. But the King decided, that he could only dissolve Parliament on the advice of his Ministers, who had no intention of counselling anything of the kind.

Probably the action upon which King George decided was the very possible in the circumstances, even though it may seem to have failed. He tried to lessen the bitterness of the party war by acting as a mediator and peacemaker, and he summoned the leaders of both sides to a conference at Buckingham Palace on July 22nd. Asquith, Lloyd George, Lord Lansdowne and Bonar Law, John Redmond and Dillon, Sir Edward Carson and Craig—these represented all the different parties, and Mr. Lowther, the Speaker of the House of Commons, was to attend as an impartial chairman.

The King opened the conference with a speech which was to cause much discussion and dissension, but for which Mr. Asquith took the responsibility since he said that it had been sent to him for revision in the usual way. Yet the words, in their grave dignity, ring truly like those of the King himself, and there seems no reason to suppose that they did not express his feelings.

(Continued on page 3)

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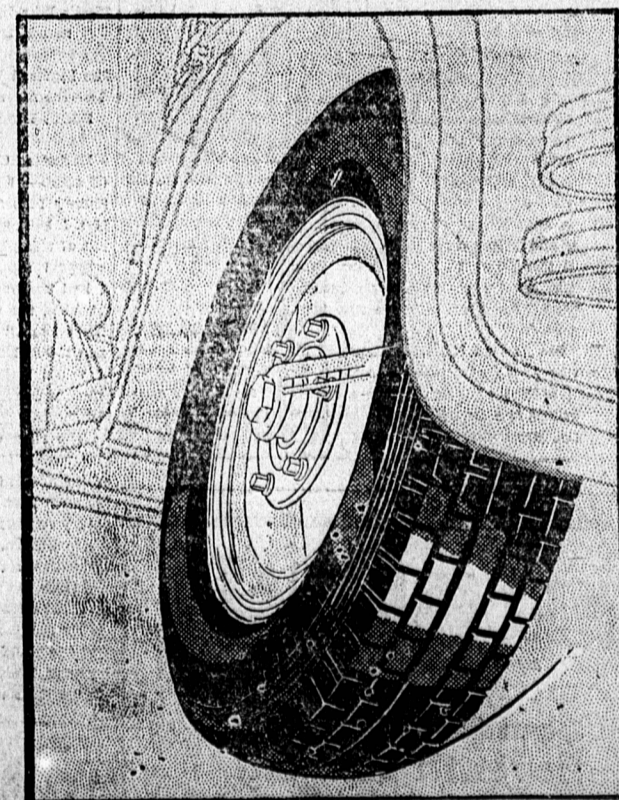
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