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A woman, likely a monarch, is seated on an ornate golden throne in a grand, vaulted cathedral. She wears a white ermine-trimmed cape over a white dress, a large jeweled crown, and a necklace of gold beads. She holds a golden scepter in her right hand. The background shows the intricate architecture of the cathedral, including arches and stained glass windows.

CHARLES NEILSON GATTEY

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CROWNING GLORY

THE MERITS OF MONARCHY



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Cover: Queen's Coronation photograph ©Beaton/Camera Press

First published in 2002 by
Shephard-Walwyn (Publishers) Ltd
107 Parkway House
Sheen Lane
London SW14 8LS
in association with
The School of Economic Science
11 Mandeville Place
London W1U 3AJ
shephardwalwyn.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN-978-0-85683-562-9

Acknowledgements

The author and publisher wish to thank the following for giving permission to reproduce their copyright material as illustrations in the book and on the jacket:

Cover: Queen's Coronation photograph ©Beaton/Camera Press

eBook produced in memory of Queen Elizabeth II
Shepherd Walwyn Publishers
September 2022

Introduction

“By the end of this century, there will be only five Kings left those of Hearts, Diamonds, Spades, Clubs, and England,” King Farouk predicted in 1951, according to his biographer Michael Stem. The only time Kings and Queens in packs of cards were abolished was in France during the Revolution when they were replaced by Citizens and Citizenesses - but it made playing cards games so boring that nobody used the new packs.

However, Farouk had good cause for making such a prediction. His overthrow was then the latest in a long line since the Russian Revolution and the rise of Socialism and Communism had swept away not only the Russian Imperial Family, but also the dynasties of Austria-Hungary, Germany, Turkey, Spain and Portugal following the First World War, and, after the Second, Italy and a number of East European kingdoms. The contagion was spreading to the Middle East with revolutions in Iraq and Egypt the tide seemed unstoppable. Other kingdoms were to topple after his, those in Libya, Burma, Laos and Cambodia.

Farouk’s prediction about England proved correct, but the five most stable countries in Europe also retained their monarchs. Moreover, in Spain the restoration of the monarchy was part of the means of re-introducing democracy, and King Juan Carlos later defended democracy against an attempted army coup. He has also added to his popularity by running and financing one of the world’s most successful and admired soccer squads, *Real Madrid*. In other countries now, monarchy is being considered as a way of healing past division: most recently in Afghanistan, but also in Eastern Europe, King Simeon of Bulgaria has returned to his country and the Crown Prince of Yugoslavia has been allowed back and had some of his property restored. Nevertheless, it is interesting that Farouk recognised something special about the British monarchy. Perhaps it was as a result of having had an English governess as a boy.

The traditional customs connected with the British monarchy certainly bring colour and elegance into the monotonous ugliness of a machine-ridden age. Britain's royal occasions are the envy of other nations for in themselves they symbolise the perfection of performance which most civilized people crave. The buildings and regalia associated with past Kings and Queens form one of the chief tourist attractions which bring millions of pounds worth of foreign currencies that are spent here.

While the monarchy is mainly a conservative force, helping to maintain stability, this very fundamental stability enables the country to absorb more radical changes in its political and social structure than would otherwise be possible without risk of disorder. To quote the late Malcolm Muggeridge: "Monarchy is the bridge between what is fluctuating and what is everlasting in human affairs."

"The evil men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones," said Mark Anthony of Julius Caesar. We remember Henry VIII's cruelty and Charles II's mistresses but ignore their merits. Let me begin with a King about whom only good (except that he burnt some cakes) is known, which may explain why he is forgotten in our cynical age.

Alfred the Great delivered England from the Danes. He was a scholar and an author in fact the father of English prose for before him only verse had been written in our native tongue. He was an educator of his people. He codified the laws and enforced them. He built up the English navy from a tiny beginning.

Few know anything about King Canute except that he got his feet wet trying vainly to command the tide a travesty of the facts. He was King of England by conquest before he was 20, and when he died aged 40 most of northern Europe lay under his rule and at peace, for he genuinely desired it and brought it to all the people he protected. He was the creator of the first United States of Europe. Under his new code of laws both the rich and the poor became for the first time equal, and the practice of condemning people to death for trivial offences ended, so did all forms of slavery. The coinage was reformed in England. It disturbed him that many of his people began to worship him as a God. He decided that he must destroy this belief by publicly demonstrating that he was as human as they were and that was why he staged the incident of attempting to command the tide. When he failed, he took off

his crown and had it placed upon the great cross in the Minster at Winchester as a token of his humility. Never again did he wear it.

William the Conqueror, despite his ruthlessness, was a just and far-sighted ruler, and there was little lawlessness in his reign. He caused the Domesday Book to be compiled and created the New Forest which, had he not, might today be instead a concrete jungle.

Henry II introduced a system of common law to the whole kingdom, in place of the various provincial customs administered in the shires and hundreds and in the innumerable private jurisdictions. He commenced the new procedure of trial by jury, instead of the old barbarous method of trial by compurgation, ordeal by hot iron or battle with one's adversary.

Edward I has been called the English Justinian. The first eighteen years of his reign saw the beginning of our statute law. The legally minded King passed statute after statute through his Parliaments which changed the very substance of the law. Hitherto it had been traditional and unwritten. His first statutes remained so long the basis of our law of real property that a knowledge of them became essential for all English lawyers up until our day. He founded Westminster School, whose *alumni* of distinction include Ben Jonson, Dryden, George Herbert, William Cowper, Sir Christopher Wren and Edward Gibbon.

Edward III founded the Order of the Garter to signal the triumph of chastity over temptation. He brought over many Flemings who laid the foundations of our textile industry and was also the first monarch to appoint Justices of the Peace.

Cambridge University was probably founded in the reign of Henry III. In 1229 he offered asylum to scholars exiled from Paris. Two years later he told the Mayor, who was objecting to this, that scholars from abroad brought honour and profit to England and that they should be pleased to accept them.

Henry VI was a great patron of learning. He founded four university colleges and Eton originally for poor scholars who could not pay for their schooling. His successor Edward IV began Windsor's beautiful St. George's Chapel which was completed by Henry VIII. He was the friend and patron of William Caxton and his book collection became the nucleus of the old Royal Library and later one of the treasures of the British Library.

The jewel of Westminster Abbey is the magnificent Chapel built by Henry VII whose victory at Bosworth Field brought peace after the havoc caused to the country by the Wars of the Roses. He curbed the power of the nobles and worked hard to revive the country's lost maritime prosperity. He financed John Cabot on his voyages of exploration to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, the practical result of which was our exploitation of the Newfoundland fishery.

Henry VIII worked hard to build up the English navy that had almost vanished during the Wars of the Roses. He was ever ready to experiment. Guns increased in range and power and Englishmen rapidly became as skilful as gunners as they were as archers in the Middle Ages. When he ascended the throne, there were only seven ships in the Royal Navy and, when he died, that number had grown to fifty-three. Henry was also a gifted musician and his composition '*Greensleeves*' has become part of our musical heritage. We owe to him many of our most attractive historical buildings: Hampton Court which he took from Wolsey and then embellished, and the handsome gate tower with its ornate clock which is the most attractive feature of St. James's Palace.

Elizabeth I had, it was said, a heart that was cold, but it was a heart of oak. She came to the throne of a country in despair and left it prosperous, rich in a renaissance of all the arts. It was also said that she loved nothing and nobody but England.

Charles I was the most outstanding art connoisseur of his time patron of Velasquez, Bernini and Van Dyck. He amassed the most valuable collection of Renaissance paintings ever assembled in England. Most were sold abroad by Cromwell but a few survived to form the nucleus of the finest royal art collection in the world today.

Under Oliver Cromwell's Puritan Republican regime all theatres were closed. We owe it to Charles II that they were reopened and that the brilliant comedies of manners of Wycherley were staged. In the great dining-room of Christ's Hospital hangs a painting by Verrio which occupies most of the wall: it depicts a scene at the court of the Merry Monarch but no debauched courtiers are to be seen only grave men of learning, and in the foreground before the throne are girls and boys of the school. The latter are in blue coats and yellow stockings, the Tudor costume of 1552 when it was founded by Edward VI to educate poor children. The picture was painted to

commemorate the foundation of the royal mathematical school at Christ's Hospital by Charles II.

The Merry Monarch was also a great patron of other arts. He founded the office of Master of the King's Musick, had an expert knowledge of architecture, supervised in person alterations and improvements to royal palaces. He had, too, a passion for gardening, recreating St. James's Park, planting flowers and walks of trees which are still there today. He also planted Love Walk, that beautiful avenue of trees going from Windsor Castle to the Great Park and laid out Greenwich Park. To him we owe the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane and what is today the world's most prestigious scientific body, the Royal Society.

With the King's active encouragement men such as Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, Edward Halley and Robert Hooke discovered many of the principles which are fundamental to modern astronomy, chemistry and physics. Charles conducted his own experiments in a laboratory at Whitehall Palace. He founded Greenwich Laboratory and it is from its meridian that longitude is reckoned.

Charles II with his brother the Duke of York, later King James II, rendered sterling services to Londoners during the Great Fire of London. Insensible to peril they rode through the city all day long calming the populace. Ankle-deep in water for many hours altogether, they handled buckets with as much diligence as the poorest man, thus maintaining morale. The famous Royal Hospital at Chelsea, home of the soldier pensioners, built by Wren, owes its existence to Charles whose statue by Grinling Gibbons stands in the centre of the front quadrangle.

If the Restoration had not taken place, Hyde Park today would be covered with houses and offices like the rest of its surroundings. It had been a forest in Henry VIII's times. He used it for hunting but James I opened it to the public. Oliver Cromwell sold it to speculators for building, but fortunately he died before this could take place and it was restored to the Crown.

That bathing haven in sweltering summers, the Serpentine, owes its existence to Queen Caroline, George II's wife, who had it prepared in 1730 at royal expense. Later, on account of the numerous accidents which had been occurring there, George III in 1794 gave a plot on the ground of the northern bank so that the Royal Humane Society might erect a house for the rendering of first aid to drowning persons.

George II's patronage of music led to a remarkable demonstration of loyalty when the Jacobite Rebellion seemed like succeeding. On 28th September 1745 a week after Cope's army was routed at Prestonpans, an arrangement Dr. Arne had specially prepared of the old English tune of 'God Save Our Noble Queen' was sung as an anthem on Drury Lane's stage and encored. Arne's pupil, Charles Burney, then made his own version for Covent Garden where it was greeted with similar fervour and continued to be sung every night until the rising was crushed. It was in this fashion that 'God Save The King' gained its place as the anthem for both Sovereign and State.

It was George II who in 1757 gave the Royal Library to the British Museum which brought with it the privilege of compulsory deposit with the library of all newly published books which still holds good.

His grandson George III fostered agricultural development and founded model farms and gave Crown lands to the nation in 1761 in return for a fixed income. They are worth a thousand times more today than then, so the nation has benefited hugely.

George IV is perhaps best remembered as far as buildings are concerned by the Marine Pavilion at Brighton. In a generation trained to admire classical simplicity, its pagodas, minarets, oriental domes were derided, but today it is the chief glory of Brighton which by his patronage he made popular.

It was George, who as Prince Regent, engaged Nash against considerable opposition as the architect for the redevelopment scheme that was to transform the face of central London. Marylebone Park an expanse of open land north of Portland Place had just reverted to the Crown from the noble families to whom it had been let. The development was to be known as Regent's Park the road that led to it as Regent's Street. These impressive improvements of London would never have taken place without the Prince Regent's advocacy. They were severely criticised at the time. Nash's architecture was called meretricious and monstrous. Only the Regent had the imagination and the artistic taste to foresee how delightful Nash's project would turn out to be when completed.

Windsor Castle was in a sorry state and turning into a ruin in parts. George IV engaged Wyattville to restore and remodel it. The round tower was raised by a stone crown 30 feet higher than the former structure. The new Grand Corridor, 550 feet in length, provided a magnificent picture gallery as

well as a covered way between the north front and the east. Some were upset by the changes, but most, including Sir Walter Scott, thought that the result was successful and impressive. An essentially Gothic structure demanded Gothic treatment and Wyattville turned Windsor Castle into one of most distinctive Gothic monuments in the world.

Another now admired cultural treasure, the marble friezes from the neglected Parthenon brought back from Greece by the Earl of Elgin, were bought for the British Museum thanks to the Prince Regent's active support and despite criticism from self-styled experts.

George was extremely humane. One of his first acts as King was to abolish the legal use of torture in his Kingdom of Hanover and the flogging of female prisoners. He was always urging his Ministers to lessen the severity of legal punishment. He also did all he could to protect animals from cruelty and was a personal friend of Richard Martin M.P. - responsible for the first legislation anywhere in the world for the prevention of cruelty to animals - and helped to found the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

The First Gentleman in Europe, as George was dubbed, had only to hear of an actor or indeed anyone in distress and he would send them money. He regularly supported numerous charities from foundling hospitals to old people's homes, from the British and Foreign Schools Society to the Royal Infirmary for Diseases of the Eye. Even his adversary, Henry Brougham, praised him for his staunch and generous support of popular education. He presented his father's library of more than 65,000 volumes to the British Museum gave the Royal Academy casts of notable ancient statues specially copied at his expense in Italy paid for a new quadrangle at Trinity College and contributed towards the upkeep of English students in Rome, etc.

A project dear to George IV's heart was the formation of a national treasury of pictures to rival any in the world. He succeeded in restoring the Royal Collection to the eminent position it had held before the Puritan art-haters of the Commonwealth Government had sold off abroad for practically nothing the superb paintings purchased by Charles I. George was always happy for the public to see his own collection. "I have not formed it for my pleasure alone," he commented when lending his Carlton House paintings for an exhibition in 1826. "I wanted them as well to gratify the public taste." In 1814 he bought 86 splendid pictures from Sir Thomas Baring - in 1819 he