

ELIZABETH AND HER FUTURE CONSORT

A Worthy Tradition Will Guide Them

Written for "The Listener"
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THE consort of the future Elizabeth II of England is no longer a subject for speculation. The Princess, we are told, has chosen—and chosen for herself. The Prince Consort-to-be is a commoner since his recent naturalisation. He is first cousin to King Paul of Greece on his father's side, second cousin on his mother's. Nevertheless, he has no Greek blood in his veins. The present royal family of Greece is descended from George of Denmark, the second King to be placed on the throne of Greece by the Great Powers of Europe when Greece secured her independence from Turkey. On his father's side the ex-Prince Philip is a direct descendant of George II of England, through a Danish line. On his mother's side, he is a great-grandson of Queen Victoria, through Princess Alice who married Louis IV of Hesse. He and Princess Elizabeth are more distant cousins than were Victoria and Albert. But in mixture of blood and rank this match may seem not so very different from the marriage of the last reigning Queen of England, which will almost certainly be referred to for matters of precedent.

In point of fact, the position is very different indeed. Victoria's marriage to Albert was a pre-arranged affair in the ordinary tradition. It was planned when the innocent protagonists were still in

the nursery. Victoria may have had it in her hands to refuse to propose marriage to the Prince. She was scarcely free to choose another. Some five different possibilities were spoken of, including Prince Alexander of the Netherlands (favoured by William IV), and a couple of English Dukes. But as far as we know Victoria became properly acquainted with none of them. Her uncle, King Leopold of the Belgians, who had missed (by the death of Princess Charlotte) being a Prince Consort himself, was determined that his young German nephew, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, should be planted beside the throne of England. The Prince, we are told, was prepared from babyhood to marry the Queen. He and his brother were sent on visits to England. Victoria waxed lyrical in her journal over the kind and charming youth. She almost fell in love. But she was an inexperienced and highly susceptible young girl who might have fallen for any handsome stranger—with less happy results. The "choice" was hers. But the marriage was arranged from childhood all the same.

Albert Was Homesick

Again, Albert was a foreigner. He was German through and through. He did not readily take to the English, whom he was bent on improving, nor they, understandably enough, to him. At the beginning he was horribly homesick. He liked an hour or two of hunting before breakfast, but a whole day

of sport was incomprehensible to him. He was something of a dilettante. He enjoyed playing the organ, painting and reading poetry; he enjoyed a certain mild gaiety and goodfellowship. He loathed the English Sunday. But if he liked more warmth of spirit than the English habitually showed, he equally disliked the formal dancing into the small hours of the morning, the rather dismal frivolity, on which his young wife flourished. Seemingly they had nothing in common. He could not at the beginning have hoped for much help from that quarter in the extraordinarily difficult position he occupied.

But Albert had a Teutonic seriousness and determination. He gritted his teeth and put all his hitherto latent energy into making a success of things. He had a sense of mission. He could do good. "Dear Mama," he wrote, after his betrothal, "with the exception of my relations with her (the Queen) my future position will have its dark sides, and the sky will not always be blue and unclouded. But life has its thorns in every position and the consciousness of having used one's powers and endeavours for an object so great as that of promoting the good of so many will surely be sufficient to support me." Poor Albert! He had to wait some years for that dream to come true.

The Queen, however, had something of the same determination, almost from the first softened by love; though it went hard with her to share her power

and subdue her headstrong wilfulness and arrogance. Her husband had a better head than she—but only through love, not reason, would she acknowledge it. Albert eventually emerged triumphant, but it was no small task to break in to humility a youthful, arrogant, and dogmatic Sovereign.

Points of Difference

All round, then, Albert's position was very different from that of Philip Mountbatten to-day. For Prince Philip, now plain Lieut. Mountbatten, is an English commoner. He was naturalised before his engagement was announced by the ordinary laws of naturalisation; not afterwards, like Albert, who required a special Act of Parliament. More than that, brought up and educated in England, Lieut. Mountbatten is in nearly all respects an Englishman, with a naval career which accords well with the traditions of the House of Windsor.

But most important difference of all, he will not, unless some sudden and drastic accident occurs, marry a reigning Queen. So perhaps, after all, the position of the consort of Queen Victoria may not provide very much in the way of precedent for the present situation.

Who Should Go First?

Nevertheless the position of a male royal consort remains a ticklish business. It is still not defined by statute nor by an accepted convention of the Constitution. On the occasion of Prince Albert's marriage the burning questions were—as they may well be to-day—ones of rank and precedence and income. As to rank, there was some suggestion of making Albert a Peer. But he flatly refused. From his own letters one might imagine this was due to an excess of nationalistic pride, were it not that Victoria in her letters made it quite clear that she would brook no interference in politics from her consort, for she and Lord Melbourne between them were fully capable of taking care of the land. So it really became a matter as to who should go first through the door. Lord Melbourne referred to the Bill for the naturalisation of Prince Leopold of Saxe Coburg, Albert's uncle, afterwards King of the Belgians. He had married Princess Charlotte, who, if she had not died young would have reigned instead of Victoria. The Bill empowered the Prince Regent to give the Prince (Leopold) precedence over everyone except princes of the blood. It was proposed that the same should be done for Albert, except that, as husband of the Queen, he should take rank above the Princes. But when the Bill for Albert's naturalisation came before the House of Lords the Duke of Wellington objected to the clause and the matter was left to the Queen. Albert's precedence was settled by Royal prerogative alone. But the situation continued to rankle. We learn that years afterwards there was a proposal to settle this matter of the position of the Prince Consort once and for all by Act of Parliament. One can imagine that in France or Germany such a matter would be cut and dried and established for all time. Not so in England, where the proposal came to nought. Albert was, in fact, even without the title of Prince



PRINCESS ELIZABETH



LIEUT. PHILIP MOUNTBATTEN