

NO ROYAL ROAD TO THE THRONE

"MEN in great place are thrice servants: servants of the Sovereign, of State; servants of fame; and servants of business; so that they have no freedom, neither in their persons, nor in their actions, nor in their times." Bacon wrote this of those who seek power, but it applies also to those born into hereditary power. The heir to such power is a servant of his sovereign as well as of the people he will one day rule, and the servant, too, of custom. What is the best preparation for a young person destined to be a sovereign? This topical question is raised in a book that traces the education and character of British heirs-apparent from the time of George I to Edward VIII.*

It is largely a story of frustration. With our much greater knowledge of psychology we can see more clearly how some of these mistakes arose. Frustration and dislike, misunderstanding and injustice are common in families. Parents will strive to mould children in their own image, and

*HEIRS APPARENT, by Thomas Sidney; Allan Wingate, English price 25s.

The story of the British Heirs-Apparent, from the time of George I to that of Edward VIII, is largely a story of frustration

children will rebel. In a royal family the situation is immensely complicated by special circumstances, including adulation, politics, and popular interest. Tennyson's lines, "That fierce light which beats upon a throne and blackens every blot," is proverbial, but compared with Tennyson's day, that light now is as an electric floodlight to a candle—immeasurably more searching and mobile. Then the camera had not been wedded to the printed word.

As *The Listener* pointed out editorially, there has always been criticism of British Royalty, but with exercise of this right there has been joined veneration, largely mystical-religious, of the institution and its representatives. In his second volume of British history, Sir Winston Churchill emphasises that this feeling remained widespread and lively during the Civil War in the time of Charles I. That over a long period criticism has lessened, and is thought by many to be improper, arises from a combination of circumstances, the most potent of which is the higher

standards by which Royalty has lived. The history of this criticism is well brought out in Thomas Sidney's book. In the disreputable 18th century criticism was frequent and often rude. Even in Queen Victoria's widowhood *Punch* made fun of her favourite Scottish servant, John Brown. The involvement of the Prince of Wales in the Baccarat Scandal of the nineties raised a storm, and one Radical M.P. predicted that in a few years the nation would turn republican. Some thought this might have happened had the hated Duke of Cumberland, and not Princess Victoria, succeeded William IV.

Victoria's education had been sketchy and her life so secluded that she was never left alone, and talked to others only under surveillance, but she brought innocence, what the author calls a "clean slate" to the Throne. What a change this was after the scandals of the Hanoverian kings and princes, when the very dogs of London barked the names of mistresses! The catalogue given here may surprise even those with a good knowledge of the period. Royal family quarrels were conducted in public, with the participants taking political sides. George I hated his son, and acted accordingly, but when that son succeeded he hated his son Frederick, apparently the best of the whole connection, and ignored his existence.

"After the death of George I a paper was found in his cabinet, written by Charles Stanhope, and detailing a proposal from Admiral Lord Berkeley that the Prince of Wales should be shanghaied aboard a ship and taken to America, 'whence he would never be heard of more.' The disposal of troublesome heirs in this way was not unknown at that time... True, the King did not apparently go further with the Admiral's proposal. But the mere fact that he filed the paper, instead of having its originators sent to the Tower for treason, suggests he took the plan seriously."

George III was a good-living man, but his son the Prince Regent and George IV turned out to be the First Cad of Europe, as well as the First Gentleman. He was a man of parts, and his vices may have been fostered by his restrictive upbringing; which one critic called a "stupid, odious, German sergeant-major system of discipline." Political considerations even entered into the choice of tutors.

MRS FITZHERBERT and the Prince of Wales (later George IV) — from the cartoon by Rowlandson

The frustration entailed by the curricula for heirs-apparent is traced through to Edward VIII. Prince Frederick, who died prematurely, wanted to be an active soldier—he coveted the command that led to Culloden—but George II would not allow it, though the King himself commanded in battle, the last to do so. The same kind of wish was denied to the Prince, who became Edward VII. In the First World War the future Edward VIII was allowed to go to the front, but not as a combatant. They feared he might be captured. His brother George, who was to become King, served with the fleet, including Jutland.

In Edward, Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII, we have a classic case of mistaken upbringing. He is nearer to our time; he was a good and most popular king; and from the first his life is copiously documented. Queen Victoria seems to have disliked him actually from birth. Her first child, the girl who became the mother of the Kaiser, was her favourite. "Bertie," as she called him, did not take to bookish education; and his father the Prince Consort, was convinced, in accord with a belief of the time, that, in this historian's words, "education could mould a human being into any shape desired by the teacher."

The brain of a baby in his cradle was regarded as a sort of blank sheet on which tutors could inscribe what they wished. Undesirable characteristics could be suppressed by discipline, and lifelong likes and dislikes, inclinations and thoughts, implanted by a tutor, who followed the right curriculum. Study and discipline were to make the heir, like his father, a combination of a giant and an encyclopaedia. The Queen was a woman of limited education and no doubt some of the weighty arguments of the German philosophers were over her head, but she was ready enough to agree, for Albert had only to pronounce something right for her to accept it as unchallengeable truth.

The Prince Consort did a great deal for the intellectual life of England, but his curriculum for his son was stupid and cruel. Albert "believed that it was long nights of study that had made him wise," and he was "without the sense of humour which gives a sense of proportion and regarded all conversation that was not 'serious' as waste of time." Victoria and Albert had the excuse that they feared in their son the recurrence of the vices of the Georges.

"His mother and father solemnly discussed the faults of his Hanoverian ancestors and considered how to suppress the tendencies Edward might have inherited. It was a worthy motive, but they went to work the wrong way, backed by their German adviser, Baron Stockmar—a man whom Gladstone (himself an over-serious person), described as a mischievous old prig. It was books, books, books—study all the time. Every day the tutor had to write a report on progress to Albert, who commented on it. 'Think of that, you moderns who dread a report once a term!'

One did not need to be a modern educationist to see the folly of all this. *Punch* published this comment:

The dear little Wales—sure the saddest of tales—
Is the tale of the studies with which they are cramming thee
In thy tuckers and bibs, handed over to Gibbs
Who for eight years with solid instruction was ramming thee.
Giants indulging the passion for this high pressure fashion
Of Prince training, *Punch* would uplift loyal warning.
Locomotives, we see, over-stoked soon may be
Till the super-steamed boiler blows up one fine morning.

Eminent men did the same. The cultivated and worldly-wise Lord Mel-

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 20, 1957.

