

A GRACIOUS LADY

HER Majesty the Dowager Queen Mary was for many years a symbol to the Commonwealth of the continuity of the royal family, and her death at 85 removes a figure who held a special place in the minds of the British people. She was a link between two centuries through six reigns, yet the respect and affection she aroused was not entirely due to her longevity or her connections with history. She was a unique personality in her own right, not only as a counsellor to her husband, two sons and grand-daughter in matters of kingly procedure and etiquette, but as one who, through her great interest in social welfare, did more perhaps than any other of her family to bring about the change of the British monarchy from a dynastic to a national institution which has taken place in the past half century.

Her life was guided by her high sense of the obligations of a monarch and her own exacting standards of royal duty, and devoted to the meticulous observance of the traditional code of royal behaviour. During the constitutional crisis caused by the abdication of her eldest son she was to a very large extent the stabilising influence within the family which helped to make the change-over leading to George VI's accession as smooth as possible. Having trained Edward VIII for his task as king and then seen her hopes for him destroyed after eleven months, she set about in the depths of her disappointment instilling in her second son and his wife the same sense of duty and responsibility. And then, anticipating the eventual death of George VI, she devoted a great deal of her time to the young Princess Elizabeth. It was noticeable that when the young Queen returned from Africa after her father's death it was she who curtsied to the older

woman, probably the only time she would make such a gesture during her reign.

A New Dignity

When Queen Mary came to the throne in 1910 she helped to bring a new dignity to the monarchy after the gaiety of Edward VII's reign. As a young woman she had taken a great interest in problems of social welfare, and she and her husband were the first royal couple to concern themselves seriously with tours of factories, hospitals and working class areas. During the war which shortly followed she undertook an immense amount of patriotic work, organising committees, collecting funds for relief projects, and inspecting troops and hospitals in Britain and France. She directed a vast Central Committee, which she had set up in 1906 to provide work for women, in the task of placing millions of housewives in productive work so as to release men for the fighting. When one of her royal relatives complained to her at the prospect of another visit to a hospital with the words, "I'm tired and I hate hospitals," she replied, "You are a member of the British royal family. We are *never* tired—and we all *love* hospitals."

She was born on May 26, 1867, at Kensington Palace, in the same room which had seen the birth of Queen Victoria. Her mother, the Duchess of Teck, was a grand-daughter of George III, and before her marriage was the popular Princess Mary of Cambridge. Her father, Franz, Duke of Teck, was the only son of Duke Alexander of Wurttemberg and the Comtesse de Rhedey, the latter being descended from the ancient Austrian house of Arpad. Her mother, the Duchess of Teck, was Queen Victoria's cousin, and Queen Mary herself was related to practically all the royal families of Europe. On her birth Victoria made a special visit of inspection, and



recorded afterwards in her journal, "A very fine baby."

During her youth Queen Mary came under the influence of two strong-minded women, her French Alsatian governess known as Madame Bricka, who persuaded her to undertake a long course of self-improvement during which she read six hours daily for seven years the works of the 19th Century historians and philosophers, and her mother's elder

sister, Aunt "Gussy," the Princess Augusta Caroline, Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. Her aunt was something of a radical and kept her informed about the new movements of Darwinism, socialism, votes for women, and such problems as that of sweated labour in the East End of London, which was the subject of a report by a Select Committee. Princess Mary took her studies so seriously that when she visited the royal shoemaker's shop to order a pair of boots, she asked, "What do you pay your work-people?" When the shoemaker replied, "Eight shilling a week," she said, "I will not buy boots made by sweated labour."

Victoria kept a close eye on the young princess and soon began to seek a husband for her. At 24 she was engaged to the Duke of Clarence, heir presumptive to the throne, who died five weeks before their marriage day. Within two years Victoria had married her to the Duke of York, the new heir presumptive, thus revealing her stubborn belief in the young princess as the best available candidate to be England's queen. "Thank God!" she wrote in her diary, "Georgie has got such an excellent, useful and good wife."

During her long life the Dowager Queen had more than her share of family anxieties, with the deaths of three of her sons and the virtual exile of another. But she never allowed family considerations to influence her performance of her public duties. She was determined to ride in the funeral procession of George VI and to stand throughout the burial service, and was only with difficulty dissuaded from what she considered to be her duty. She was in the best sense of the word a matriarch, and her death has made an irreplaceable gap in the dwindling ranks of the kings and queens of Europe.



QUEEN MARY with King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on the balcony of Buckingham Palace after the Coronation in 1937. In the foreground are the present Queen (then Princess Elizabeth) and Princess Margaret