

MARGINAL NOTES

MONARCHY AND DEMOCRACY.—The Coronation of His Majesty King George VI, the forty-first occupant of the English throne in succession from William the Conqueror, has now become an event in history. Exemplifying as it did the permanence of a throne founded of old upon the popular will, the event became one of surpassing interest to thinking men in this bewildered age. On its purely ceremonious side the Coronation revealed in an impressive way that the British peoples have not yet forgotten that to honour their anointed King is a duty which finds its primary sanction in religion; while from a constitutional view-point it was of high importance because only when the requirements of its ritual elements—beginning with Election and closing with Inthronization—have been fully observed does the King assume the throne and become an integral part of the government of England—a political system that has been variously called a Limited Monarchy, a Constitutional Monarchy and a Parliamentary Democracy.

** Adverting to Democracy in the light of its operation in restraint of any exercise of autocracy by the Crown, we find the beginnings of that restraint in the primitive institutions of the Nordic peoples who effected permanent settlement in Britain after its occupation by the Romans had come to an end. Tacitus in his *Germania* tells us that the monarchic, aristocratic and democratic elements were clearly marked in the political life of these peoples before their migration from the continent. In some of the tribal communities kings were chosen from particular families, but the regal power was a limited one, and the king was rather the representative of the unity of the tribe than its ruler. Caesar in his *Commentaries* supports this estimate of the king's power when he says that Ambiorix, King of the Eburones in Gaul, described his authority as a limited one because while he governed the people, they, in their turn subjected him to the laws which they themselves had made.

So that if these Roman writers truly represent the status of the Nordic tribal king as that of an incarnate symbol of the political unity of his people rather than that of a despot, then this tribal kingship was a prototype of the constitutional office exercised by His Majesty King George VI in accordance with the will of the four hundred millions of people dwelling within his allegiance.

* * There have been occasions in history when occupants of the throne had to be reminded that the garden of parliamentary democracy in England was exceedingly poor soil for the cultivation of autocracy and dictatorship. One recalls in this connection Bacon's wise counsel to James I when that eccentric off-spring of the tragic union of Mary Queen of Scots with Darnley succeeded to Elizabeth's throne :

Look on a Parliament as a certain necessity, but not only as a necessity; as also a unique and most precious means for uniting the Crown with the Nation, and proving to the world outside how Englishmen love and honour their King, and their King trusts his subjects. Deal with it frankly and nobly as becomes a King, not suspiciously like a huckster in a bargain. Do not be afraid of Parliament. Be skilful in calling it; but don't attempt to "pack" it.

When King George VI spoke on the night of his coronation to the vast radio audience of those who are proud to call themselves his subjects, 'listeners-in' knew that he needed no such advice as that given to the founder of the House of Stuart. It is useful to ponder his inspiring words. I quote some of them:—

It is with a very full heart I speak to you tonight. Never before has a newly-crowned king been able to talk to all his peoples in their own homes on the day of his coronation.

Never has the ceremony itself had so wide a significance, for the dominions are now free and equal partners with this ancient kingdom. I felt this morning that the whole Empire was in very truth gathered within the walls of Westminster Abbey.

To many millions the crown is a symbol of unity. By the grace of God and by the will of the free peoples of the British Commonwealth I have assumed that Crown. In me, as your King, is vested for a time the duty of maintaining its honour and integrity.

This is indeed a grave and constant responsibility but it gave me confidence to see your representatives in the Abbey and to know that you too were enabled to join in that infinitely beautiful ceremonial.

Its outward forms come down from distant times, but its inner meaning and message are always new. For the highest of distinctions is the service for others, and to the ministry of kingship I have, with your sharing, dedicated myself with the Queen at my side in words of the deepest solemnity. We will, God helping us, faithfully discharge our trust.

In view of these utterances who shall say that England in the present age will cease to be what she was in Shakespeare's eyes two hundred years before his own spacious day :

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle.

This earth of majesty.

This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings.

CHARLES MORSE.