ARISTOCRACY IN ENGLAND.

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VIII.

The Crown in Politics.

If all the parade of obeisance that surrounds the Queen indicated the real power of a mighty sovereign, even democrats might appreciate the pageantry. If Victoria were an Elizabeth and could send her nobles to the Tower, if she possessed the authority of Kaiser or Czar, or one tithe of the influence in public affairs of an American President, the shows of supremacy would have significance. Prerogative may be arrogant without pretension, and autocracy is not ridiculous, however imperious. But the abject statesmen who sat at the feet of their mistress at St. Paul's were Mayors of the Palace after all. It is the change of a ministry, not the death of a sovereign, that convulses England.

I was talking once with a Prime Minister, who declared that the great fault in American institutions is the quadrennial change of Presidents and the political turbulence that attends it. "Nothing like this," he said, "occurs when an English sovereign dies." I could not refrain from answering that the parallel did not hold. The real crisis in England is when a government goes out of power, not when a monarch leaves the scene. The statesman was silent. He could not deny that his own downfall would be a greater event than the demise of his mistress and the transfer of the regalia to another wearer. These are but the trappings and the suits of power.

Lord Beaconsfield could make the Queen into an Empress, and the government of the day settles the allowance of every royal prince when he arrives at his majority, as well as the dowry of every princess at her marriage. It even determines the income of the sovereign upon an accession to the throne. The Queen cannot create a peer against the will of the Prime Minister. If he makes out a list of his adherents to be elevated to the upper House, Her Majesty is sometime asermitted to add the name of a personal friend, but not too often. She can refuse her sanction to no measure which the government approves. Her speeches from the throne are all written for her. She must even accept distasteful ministers if the House of Commons or the nation will have no others.

The Queen, nevertheless, declines to consider herself a mere mouthpiece for her ministers. A few years ago I was staying at the house of a member of the government who had just returned from Balmoral—for a minister is always in attendance on the Queen to lay public business before her and procure her signature to public documents. My host assured me that Her Majesty took the liveliest interest in national affairs, that she studied closely all matters of importance, had opinions of her own and expressed them freely, and sometimes induced her ministers to change their minds. Her long experience and acquaintance with political men give her some advantages that none of her subjects can enjoy. She has never been out of office, and she knows the secrets of both the great parties in the State.

Until quite recently, however, the ordinary Englishman supposed his sovereign to be excluded from all participation in politics, a mere puppet, whose strings the minister pulled. But when the Memoirs of Baron Stockmar, the tutor of the Prince Consort, appeared, they divulged the fact familiar to the initiated, that both the Queen and the Prince had always entertained decided opinions on political subjects, and more than once had attempted to affect, and even to change, the foreign policy of England. Diplomacy, indeed, is the sphere in which the Queen especially aspires to exert an influence. Her foreign connections by blood and marriage undoubtedly contribute to mould her opinions; and she dislikes, besides, to appear to foreign sovereigns to possess less weight in the affairs of her own kingdom than they enjoy in theirs. So she keeps up a correspondence on state matters with kings and emperors which she fancies is of importance, and which may, indeed, sometimes have had its influence; though doubtless the Bismarcks and Gortchakoffs have been careful to discount the feminine diplomacy at its actual value.

The discovery of this royal intervention created not only widespread surprise, but unfavorable, and even hostile, comment among her subjects; for there are not a few in England, and their number increases every year, who hold the functions of a constitutional sovereign to consist in simply signing, with closed eyes and lips, whatever document a minister may present. They submit to monarchy only on condition that its claws shall be closely pared. But now the Queen stood revealed as something more than a figurehead; the machine was an automaton, but with a concealed workman; for her judgment, it was seen, had been not merely guided, but controlled, by her foreign husband, while the Prince himself had relied in a great measure on the advice of his German mentor, Baron Stockmar, an individual of whose very existence nine-tenths of the British nation had been unaware.

These disclosures were at first distasteful to the court, which, at least in the Prince Consort's time, had been content with a share of power without the show; but when once the real state of affairs was unveiled a bold face was put on the matter. In the "Life of the Prince Consort," written with not only the sanction, but the avowed assistance of the Queen, the doctrine was defended that the sovereign of right should have opinions, and maintain them, too, on all subjects of national importance. One volume of this work appeared at the height of the controversy in regard to the Turco-Russian war; and the leaning of the court in that controversy was purposely and unmistakably made apparent.

The result was proof that no serious intervention of the crown will ever be tolerated in English politics again. The interposition in this instance was very generally regarded as injudicious, and by many was resented as an unwarrantable encroachment; while the dislike which in various quarters had been felt for the character and policy of Lord Beaconsfield was in some degree extended to the Queen. At no time during my long residence in England was there so much of downright animosity displayed toward the court. Politicians wantonly fanned the flame for selfish or party purposes, and courtiers foolishly followed their example, dragging Majesty itself into the strife. Lord Beaconsfield, one of the ablest and most unscrupulous adventurers who ever rose to power, was directly answerable for this opposition toward the Queen. He deliberately used his influence with a weak old woman, beguiling her by flattery and a show of deference for her opinions, to assume an authority that he knew the nation would resent; an authority which he was himself to exercise, while the opinions were those that he had himself infused.

With a few in England—the courtiers and those who aspire to be courtiers—the sentiments of the sovereign still have weight. Here and there a genuine Tory survives who believes in the divine right of kings, because that implies the divine right of dukes and earls and landed gentry and superiors generally. The nobility, as a class, perceive that their cause is bound up with that of the throne; that if one is overturned, the other must roll in the dust; if one is maintained, the other is likelier to remain secure. Like the priests of a false religion, they fall down before the image they have themselves set up, and, in the eyes of the multitude, are its profoundest worshippers. It is with this feeling that they behave toward the Queen as if she were the Grand Lama of Thibet, and keep up the mummeries that have been discarded by the Mikado of Japan. Perhaps at times the homage is in part sincere. People often persuade themselves of what they wish to believe, and by dint of repeating a form one may come to accept a creed.

There are others who see through the sham, but go through the show all the same; the courtiers who are so close as to perceive the nakedness of royalty under its robes, or the aspirants and adventurers who are aware that this is the way to make themselves acceptable to their social superiors. Lord Beaconsfield was chief among these, and knew how to use the others; to form a party out of them, and to crowd himself to the head of the party. He was so much cleverer than any one else in England, that he, the most un-English of English statesmen, of a hated race and hostile creed, without either the nobler qualities or the adventitious aids that Englishmen seem equally to reverence, without family or fortune, or political honesty or consistency, was able to make himself the leader of the aristocracy of England; to represent and to control both the Tories and the Crown. Knowing full well that the course to which he advised the Queen was sure to prove in the end injurious to the Crown, that to thrust Majesty at the people at this day was to endanger its existence, he yet believed that the danger would not come nor the storm burst in his time. He could and would retain power and place by pandering to the vanity of the Queen and playing on the loyalty of her subjects, and on the veneration of the English people for whatever is established.

For a while the scheme worked well. The influence of the Crown helped him to gain voters in Parliament, though he lost them out of it; and he had the sagacity, besides, to appeal to the imperial instinct in Englishmen as well as to the national pride, combining these in his own designs, and making them the tools to contribute to his supremacy. He carried his measures for a day.

The Queen had no longer the calm judgment and the strong good sense of the Prince Consort to lean upon, and, woman like, allowed her partialities and prejudices to be seen. This, it is true, could at first be done only in petty matters—invitations withheld from one rival, or visits paid to another; but such indications are significant at a court, and they were not wanting. Mr. Gladstone was left out from state banquets at Windsor, and the Queen lunched with Lord Beaconsfield at his country house—an honor she had paid no minister for years. These very demonstrations of the royal preference, however, contributed to the downfall of the Beaconsfield government, for they were felt to indicate a political bias in Her Majesty, and the idea became prevalent that the court was interfering in politics beyond any recent precedent. The indignation which this belief aroused was in many quarters profound. For a time it seemed as if the monarchical principle had received a blow; no one thought a fatal one, but when a structure stands in an unsafe way, when similar ones are tottering or falling on every side, when there are foes within as well as without the walls, the garrison should beware of inviting attack or exposing the vulnerable points, which may thus far have been screened. Immediately after the appearance of the royal book, which was in reality a manifesto, Lord Beaconsfield was hurled from power, and there can be no doubt that the avowed favor of the Crown contributed directly to this result. The people were determined that the Queen should reign but not rule. The engineer was hoist with his own petard.

The royal feeling at this juncture rose so high that when the Tories were overthrown, and the time came according to English usage for the sovereign to send for the chief of the Opposition to form a government, Her Majesty offered the Premiership to two members of the Liberal party before she commanded to call Mr. Gladstone to her counsels. But Lord Granville and Lord Hartington were loyal to their chief, and informed the Queen that only Mr. Gladstone would be accepted by the nation; and Her Majesty was obliged to yield, though not, it is said, without tears. So the man she disliked was summoned; he kissed her hand and became her chief counsellor, the head of her government and the director of all her public acts. The bubble that Lord Beaconsfield had blown so high had burst forever.

The Queen, however, is not without sagacity, and certainly has no wish to imperil her throne. She can discern the line which she must never transgress. She means, besides, to be constitutional, though if she be so, no English sovereign ever was before; no other was compelled to submit his own will so absolutely and constantly to that of the nation. But the English Constitution grows and changes continuously, like the character of a living man. It is not made of marble, chiselled and cut to order; and the idea of the subjection of the sovereign has developed marvellously of late. Her Majesty is well aware of the tacit conditions on which she keeps her throne, and invariably accepts the situation when it becomes inevitable. So she wiped her eyes. Beaconsfield, the tempter, had led her astray, put naughty notions into her head, and she, not unnaturally, regretted the minister who had flattered her vanity and humored her pride; who added to her titles and extended her dominions; but when he was gone, she subsided into the good Queen of present England again—sent telegrams of condolence to sick or dying friends, distributed India shawls among the aristocracy, wrote a book about John Brown instead of the Prince Consort, and for a while let politics alone. She and Mr. Gladstone appeared to run along very amicably together. The new Prime Minister was asked to the next royal wedding though when he stayed at Windsor it was said that his sleep was disturbed by the screaming of Beaconsfield's peacocks, which the Queen had brought from her former Premier's funeral.

The English are good-natured over, on the whole, and they like dignities and establishments—"something to kotow to;" and Whigs, and even Radicals, content with the possession of place and power, quickly forget their recent rage. No more diatribes or pamphlets appeared transcending etiquette and censuring majesty, and the Queen seemed to recover her pristine popularity. It was a family quarrel, after all, and is apparently entirely healed; but it would be wiser and better for all concerned not to provoke it again.

ADAM BADEAU.

QUEER WRINKLES.

A Conscientious Witness.

Counsel (to witness)—The previous witness swore that when found he was breathing like a porpoise.

Witness—I dunno 'bout dat, sah.

Counsel—You were present?

Witness—Yes, sah.

Counsel—Examined him carefully?

Witness—Yes, sah. I exaun d him keerfully.

Counsel—And yet you will not swear that he was breathing like a porpoise?

Witness—No, sah.

Counsel—You will state to the Court why.

Witness—Cos I neb'ber heard a po'poise breave, sah.

Branching Out.

Commercial Traveller (to Dakota grocer)—Anything else you think of?

Grocer—I guess that's all this time.

Commercial Traveller—How's your stock of soap?

Grocer—I've never kept it. You might add to the order a couple of boxes of soap for a sample, and I'll see how it takes.

On the Island.

Visitor (at Blackwell's Island)—Well, my poor woman, what brought you to this place?

Woman—De Brack Maria, sah, an' de ferry bo't.

Visitor—Yes, I understand. But what are you in for?

Woman—Ise in fo' ten days, sah.

Beautifying the Complexion.

Wife—My complexion is getting dreadfully florid. Do you think it would be wrong if I were to take arsenic?

Husband—Well, I dunno.

Wife—It would give me a fair, pale color, would it not?

Husband—Oh, yes, if you ate enough of it.

Almost Forgotten Him.

Magistrate—Ever been arrested before?

Prisoner—No, sah.

Magistrate—Didn't I send you to the Island last winter for ten days?

Prisoner—I declar's to goodness, now I looks at yo', Judge, I b'lieves yo' did. But I se a poo' hau' to 'member faces.

A Sensible Young Woman.

"No, George," she said, pushing her empty dish away, "no more to-night, thanks."

"Just one dish more," pleaded the generous George.

"No," she replied firmly, "no more. Remember, George, we are to be married shortly, and it behooves us to practise economy. Besides, four dishes of ice cream at this season of the year is enough."

A Noble Woman.

Second Husband (to wife)—Are you as fond of me as you were of your first husband, dear?

Wife—Yes, indeed; and if you were to die, John, I would be just as fond of my third. I'm not a woman to marry for anything but love.

A Guarantee Goes With It.

Dealer—That painting, madam, is a Botticelli.

Madam—A botty who?

Art Dealer—A Botticelli. We guarantee its authenticity.

Madam—Well, will you guarantee it won't crack?

A Pleasant Remedy.

Man (with a terrible cold)—Gimme (cough) rum and (cough) molasses.

Bartender—Sorry, sir, but we haven't a bit of molasses.

Man—Well, I've got to cough (cough) something to (cough) stop this terrible cough. Gimme me (the (cough) rum without molasses.

Mouths to Feed.

Young Mother (displaying the baby)—Isn't she a dear little thing, Mr. Podsnap?

Podsnap (father of a large family)—Yes, they're expensive. I've got six of 'em.

He Recognized the Locality.

A commercial traveller bound west climbed into his berth after leaving Pounkeepsie and fell asleep. When he awakened, some hours later, the train was standing at a station, a drizzling rain falling, and the following conversation taking place just outside of his window:

First speaker—It's a blankety —— ! —— ! —— ! wet night, Brown.

Second speaker—Yes, blank the —— ! —— ! —— ! weather!

First speaker—Did you ever see anybody on the blanket —— ! —— ! —— !