

There are many reasons why we may with confidence welcome the accession of Edward VIII to the throne of his ancestors. The new king comes of a royal family which has inherited and been true to great traditions of public service. Many of us still vividly recall the passing of Queen Victoria. Four years before her death she had celebrated the diamond jubilee of her accession to the throne. Most of the generation of that day had known no other sovereign. It seemed, at that moment, as if the British throne would never again have so revered and illustrious a sovereign. That was thirty-five years ago. Since that time, the son and the grandson of Queen Victoria have occupied the throne, and each has left a memory revered, not by British peoples only, but by all men and nations.

The death of Queen Victoria occurred between the dissolution in Canada of one parliament and the convening of another. By a rather remarkable coincidence, the first day of the meeting of the new parliament, after the death of Queen Victoria—Canada's ninth parliament—was, as has been the first day of this the eighteenth parliament, on the 6th of February. Speaking, in 1901, as I am now speaking to the newly assembled members of the House of Commons, the Right Honourable Sir Wilfrid Laurier, referring to the new king, also Edward by name, declared that he who was a wise prince would be a wise king; that the policies which had made the British empire so great under his predecessor would also be his policies, and that the reign of King Edward VII would be simply a continuation of the reign of Queen Victoria.

In expressing our feelings toward our new king, I can think of no words more appropriate than words similar to those used by Sir Wilfrid Laurier in reference to Edward VII. He who has been so beloved as a prince, will, we believe, be beloved in even greater measure as a king. We believe that the policies which have made for unity and friendship under his predecessor will also be his policies; and that the reign of King Edward VIII will be simply a continuation of the reign of King George V.

In his first public utterance as sovereign, Edward VIII declared to his privy council that he was determined to follow in his father's footsteps in upholding constitutional government, and in working for the happiness and welfare of all classes of his subjects. These words His Majesty repeated in a message to the British House of Commons, written in his own hand, and which contained, as well, a reference to the manner in which King George was ever actuated by a profound sense of duty.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

We did not need to be thus assured that it would be King Edward's determination to follow in the way his father had set before him. Along more paths than one he has already followed in his father's footsteps. There is scarcely a part of the British empire King Edward did not visit during the years he was known to us all as the Prince of Wales. His knowledge of the empire and its problems is infinitely greater than was that of King George at the time he came to the throne. His personal friendships with his subjects are vastly more numerous. He is no stranger to government or matters of state. Time and again he has taken his part as representative of the crown on ceremonial and other occasions, and in all parts of the world. The British peoples in different parts of the world had come to look upon him, in his visits to foreign countries, as their ambassador at large. King Edward VIII comes to the throne to-day with a wide knowledge of his people and their problems.

Nor can there be any mistaking King Edward's deep interest in social problems, or his desire for friendship with all men and nations. All who have followed his career know that he has much at heart the condition of those whose struggle is against poverty and adversity. His visits to the industrial areas, his interest in the housing problem, his desire to rid the cities of Britain of their slums, his advocacy of other forms of social betterment and social service, speak for themselves. What he saw of war in France and Flanders, and, even more, what he knows of the legacies it has left, have given him a passionate desire for peace. To the interest and power manifested in these directions as Prince of Wales will now be added the authority and prestige of the throne.

It is not the new king's part in government, so much as our own, that, it seems to me, calls for concern at this time. That King Edward has a profound sense of duty, and that he will uphold constitutional government, and that at all times he will have uppermost the welfare and happiness of all classes of his subjects, there is not the least doubt. It must not be forgotten, however, that terrible as were many of the years of King George's reign, King Edward has come to the throne at what may yet be seen to be the most critical and difficult period in the history of the world.

Constitutional government, while it places great responsibilities upon a sovereign, places even heavier responsibilities upon his advisers. An ill-advised word, an error in judgment on the part of those in authority, may, in times

W.L.M. King Papers, Memoranda and Notes, 1933-1939
(M.G. 26, J 4, volume 207, pages C142419-C143041)

PUBLIC ARCHIVES
ARCHIVES PUBLIQUES
CANADA

