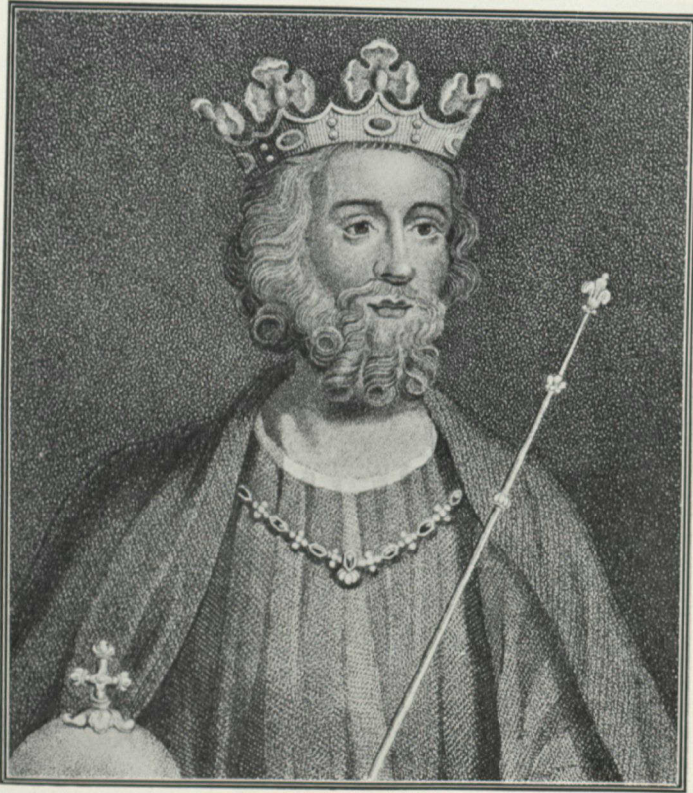




KING EDWARD THE SECOND—CROWNED 1307

Edward I is a somewhat shadowy figure, looking back across six centuries and a half of time, but he fills the part of a national hero if ever a king did. His physical strength and great stature were the visible signs of considerable mental power and, upon the whole, a noble character. His exploits as a Crusader against the Mohammedans, loyalty to his weak father at home, and an admirable personal life, are wholly in his favour. But history gives him most credit for his remarkable military successes over the Welch and the Scotch, and for his labours as a lawgiver. He is called the "English Justinian." The conquest of Wales and Scotland was complete for the time being, but brought out the cruel side of the king's character. In improving and codifying the laws respecting trade, feudal abuses, and other pressing grievances, Edward I exhibit-

ed his best qualities, which were essentially constructive and reforming. A strong ruler, he was frugal without being miserly, religious rather than superstitious, and his strict morality avoided asceticism. Such a king was rare in that age. The England of the 13th century, however, was but a small country with scarce 2,000,000 of people, who followed pastoral pursuits in primitive fashion. Upon that limited stage Edward I played his part well, and the English people may look back with satisfaction to a reign when law, the beginnings of a free Parliament, and the assertion of civil rights were outstanding features.

Under Edward II much of his father's work collapsed. He was quite unfitted to rule. The weak amiability of the Confessor and some of the piety were in his composition, but the national conditions differed entirely. A strong