

THE KING'S CHAMPION

By HORACE WYNDHAM

A picturesque and important figure at the Coronation ceremonial of English monarchs in bygone times was furnished by the Hereditary Champion. The holder of this appointment (which is perhaps the most remarkable relic of feudalism still extant) was required to ride into Westminster Hall during the progress of the Coronation banquet and challenge to mortal combat anybody who should dispute the Sovereign's title to the Crown. The office dates from the Ascension of William the Conqueror, who conferred it upon one of his attendants, Robert de Marmyon, together with the manor of Scrivelsby in Lincolnshire. At one period the estate was worth £2,000 per annum, and a condition of the owner's tenancy was that on a certain day every year he should "exhibit a milk white bull with black ears to the people, who are to run it down and then cut it in pieces for distribution among the poor."

About the year 1291 the last Marmyon died, and the Scrivelsby estate passed into the possession of Sir John Dymoke, a connection by marriage. Ever since then it has been held, together with the Championship, by a member of this family. One of them, Sir Robert Dymoke, lived in five reigns, and officiated under three Sovereigns. The first time a Dymoke assumed office was in 1377, at the Coronation of Richard II. Among his perquisites he claimed "the best charger save one in the King's stables, and the best suit of armour save one in the Royal armoury." He was also presented with twenty yards of crimson cloth. This Champion, Sir John Dymoke, seems to have been a little over zealous, for he arrived at Westminster before the banquet commenced. "Thereupon," observes a historian, "the Lord Marshal came to him, and said he should not have appeared so soon. The Champion complied with the admonition and retired." When the proper time arrived and he was admitted, he delivered his challenge in the following form:—

"If there be any man of high degree or low that will say that this our Sovereign liege, Lord Richard, cousin and heir of the King of England, Edward late deceased, ought not of right to be King of England crowned, he is ready now till the last hour of his breath, with his body to beat him like a false man and a traitor on whatever day shall be appointed."

During the Puritan regime of the Commonwealth, the Championship was shorn of much of its former splendour, and Sir Edward Dymoke was fined by Cromwell for "bearing a lewd and malicious title." However, when Charles II. came to the Throne his dignity was restored, and he was given special prominence. At the Coronation ceremony of James II. a little *contretemps* occurred, for the Champion (overcome either by fatigue or, possibly, alcohol), fell down on the floor of Westminster Hall. Thereupon the Queen turned to his Majesty and remarked, "See you, love, what a weak Champion you have!" According to our account of the incident, "the King only laughed; and the Champion excused himself, pretending his armour was heavy, and that he himself was weak with sickness, which"—the chronicler maliciously adds—"was false, for he was very well."

When a Champion fulfilled his duties satisfactorily he was entitled to receive as his honorarium the horse and armour he had used, as well as the gold cup in which the Sovereign

pledged him. For some reason or other, however, the outfit was surrendered to the Board of Ordnance after the Coronation of Queen Anne. When the Champion of the period applied for its return the Board resisted the application and sent him £60 instead. The Duke of Wellington, as Master General of the Ordnance, issued the last instructions ever given for equipping the King's Champion. This was in 1820, and the warrant was made out for "one suit of armour, *cap-a-pie* lined and complete; a pair of gauntlets, lined with doeskin gloves; one target painted with the Dymoke arms and fringed with silk; one sword, gilt hilt, and crimson velvet scabbard; one sword-hilt; and one pair of pistols."

Thus attired, the Champion figured very prominently at the Coronation of George IV. While the official banquet was in progress the doors of Westminster Hall were suddenly flung open, and the Champion, attended by the Duke of Wellington, Lord Howard of Effingham, and the Marquis of Anglesey, rode in on a piebald charger. He was clad in a suit of steel, with a tri-coloured plume of ostrich feathers in his helmet, and carried a gauntlet. Before he hurled down this emblem of defiance, a Herald sprang forward and read the terms of the challenge. This declared that the Champion was "ready in person to combat" with anybody who should "deny or gainsay our Sovereign Lord King George the Fourth." The Champion then threw his gauntlet on the floor, from which it was picked up and returned to him by the Herald. After the ceremony had been performed three times, the Champion backed his horse out of the Hall. He did not leave, however, until the King had pledged him in a gold cup. This was the last occasion when the Champion actually carried out his office. As the hereditary Champion at this time happened to be a clergyman, the Rev. John Dymoke, he had a deputy in his son, Henry, a young naval officer. The next Sovereign, William IV., decided, as did Queen Victoria, to do without the services of a Champion. To compensate the Dymoke who would have discharged the duties, this member of the family was created a baronet in 1841. On his death the Scrivelsby estate passed to his brother, another clergyman, who thus became the eighteenth holder of the Championship.

There is only one authenticated instance on record when the Champion's glove was picked up by a spectator. This happened in 1689 at the Coronation of William and Mary. As the gauntlet lay on the floor, an old woman seized it and ran out of Westminster Hall, leaving in its place her own glove with a challenge fastened on it, demanding that the Champion should fight a duel with her in Hyde Park the next morning. Enquiry elicited the fact that this was a practical joke. There is also a legend (which Sir Walter Scott utilized in one of his novels) that the gauntlet was lifted by a Stuart partizan at the Coronation of George III. Sir John Dymoke, however, who held the office, does not mention any such episode in his account of the ceremony.

The present Champion is Mr. Frank Seaman Dymoke, who combines with his post the historical one of Standard Bearer of England. He lives in Lincolnshire, where he is engaged in the peaceful pursuit of farming. When the Dymoke who hurled down his glove at Queen Victoria's Coronation died, it was thought that

the last member of the family had gone. But this was not so, since a claimant appeared in the father of Mr. Frank Dymoke, who was able to satisfy the College of Arms that he was descended from a junior branch of the house. After a long investigation of his pedigree, the claim was admitted, and he was awarded the historic mansion of Scrivelsby, as well as the priceless collection of Coronation cups and suits of armour and horse trappings which had fallen to the Crown. Of these cups there should be twenty-one; but some have been lost, and others were destroyed in a fire. Only seven cups remain as heirlooms. They are those that were presented to the Champion by James II., William III., Anne, and George I., George II., George III., and George IV.

The Farce of British Music

AT the International Musical Society's Congress the other day Mr. Balfour spoke strongly in praise of British music. According to him, "We can now look our Continental friends in the face and say that Britain at last is in process of taking her place among the great creative musical communities."

Now, this sounds very fine, but even granting that British musical composers are showing more originality at the present time than they did in the past, the fact remains that the British nation as a whole remains as unmusical as ever it was, and shows little signs of changing.

Of course, I am aware that people go to concerts and the opera more nowadays than they used to do; but, after all, the whole thing is the merest farce, for not more than one per cent. of the audience in a big concert hall is really musical. The majority go either because it is a fashionable affair, or because they like to tell their friends that they have been everywhere.

The average man in the street cares very little for classical music or wonderful virtuosity. He will whistle the latest Viennese waltz half the day through, but talk to him of Beethoven or Wagner, and he will tell you that he is not in the least bit interested. In Continental countries the men are more musical than the women. In this country the majority of concert-goers are women. If we were really a musical nation, our men would be more musical than our women. The women who frequent British concert-halls are not true musicians. They are usually merely hysterical.

And as for the opera! Believe me, Britishers do not go to become enraptured with the music. They go because Society people go. They go to see the diamonds, the scenery, to satisfy their snobbish desire to sit in the seats of the mighty. And as for the Society people themselves, without whose patronage the opera would die a sudden death—well, a box is a very comfortable place in which to discuss the latest fashions, and it is better than sitting at home, and is a welcome change from playing bridge or coddling pet puppies.

No; we are not a musical nation. Our climate is against us. The true musician must possess something of the divine fire of genius—something of the divine fire of mystical genius. Mysticism and the British character are as foreign to one another as is a plum-pudding to a motor-car.

I would respectfully remind Mr. Balfour that although British composers may be getting better, there would have been no British school of music had there not been the foreign models to copy from.

I do not seek to disparage Britishers; we are greater than other nations in very many ways, but music is not among them.—M. A. P.

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