

# CROWNING OF KING GEORGE

*Second British Coronation of the Twentieth Century Reviewed and Described in the Light of History and Current Events.*

By W. T. ALLISON

Special Canadian Correspondent of "The Courier" at the Coronation.

SAMUEL PEPYS, the pop-eyed diarist who saw everything that happened in the London of his day, and who described all that he saw with "brilliant malice," has left us a picture of the coronation of Charles II. "A great pleasure it was," he writes, "to see the Abbey raised in the middle, all covered with red, and a throne (that is a chaire) and a foot-stool on top of it, and all the officers of all kinds, so much as the very fiddlers in red vests." If Pepys could have been present among the thousands of guests from all parts of the habitable globe who made Westminster Abbey bright with splendor at the coronation of King George V., he would have had no place in his diary for such common words as "fiddlers" and "red vests." He would have ransacked his vocabulary for public phrases and imperial epithets. For even to this generation, glutted with grandeur, and surfeited with pageants, even to those who have lived in the reign of three sovereigns, who have witnessed the Jubilee procession of 1897, the majestic funeral pageant of the great Queen, the coronation of King Edward in August, 1902, and his funeral cortege last year, when twenty-seven kings followed him to the tomb after his short but happy reign, even these subjects of three monarchs declare that the coronation of our sailor King, on June 22nd, was the most superb national event which has ever been seen in Europe. The ever-increasing pomp and glory which attend the crowning of a King of England, and which make the coronation of Pepys' Merry Monarch so tawdry by way of contrast, are due to two causes: the rise of the great Empire over seas with a development of imperial sentiment that has grown by leaps and bounds during the last decade, and in the second place, to a certain warmth and expansiveness betokening a change in the temperament of the English people.

Few among the assembled millions who cheered His Majesty gave a thought of George IV., dead and gone these eighty years. But there was one reminder of his vanished splendour; for the new King, his successor in the Georgian line, wore the imperial mantle or pall used by his ancestor instead of that of Edward VII. All these years the beautiful garment has been kept in a cedar box. Made of the finest cloth of gold, with the badges of the three kingdoms woven into its surface, it looked as fresh in appearance as if it had been made yesterday. But it was only in the wearing of this robe that the coronation of our King bore any relation to that of George IV., for although the earlier George spent £25,000 on the festivities which marked his occasion, and was crowned in great pomp, his conduct towards the unhappy Queen Caroline and her exclusion from the Abbey filled the streets of London with a raging mob of her sympathizers. So great was his fear of his subjects that, George IV., after the coronation ceremony and feast, was obliged to ride to the palace by a circuitous route through mean streets. There were no police in his day and he was thankful to get home disguised and unobserved.

But for the coronation of King George V. and Queen Mary, his beloved wife, coronation day could not dawn too soon for millions of loyal subjects. London was astir at three o'clock in the morning. Many of the soldiers and constables who were required to march long distances to their posts of duty enjoyed only an hour or two of sleep on coronation eve. Thousands of people, who could not afford to expend three guineas and upwards in procuring elevated seats or windows along the route of the procession, left their homes while it was yet dark, and selected a square foot of space on a curbstone, there to wait nine weary hours. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, were all there. In the dim dawn came Bottom, the weaver, carrying his day's rations wrapped up in a copy of the *Daily Mail*. Next to him in the line stood Snug, the joiner, and behind him again was Quince, the carpenter. Starveling, the tailor, jostled Sarah Gamp, and, by sunrise, all the free space was taken, which means that five and six lines of spectators were ranked along the narrow sidewalks and great masses were wedged together at such open spaces as Hyde Park Corner, Trafalgar Square and Charing Cross.

Twenty thousand policemen, the pride of London, were scattered along the thoroughfares. From

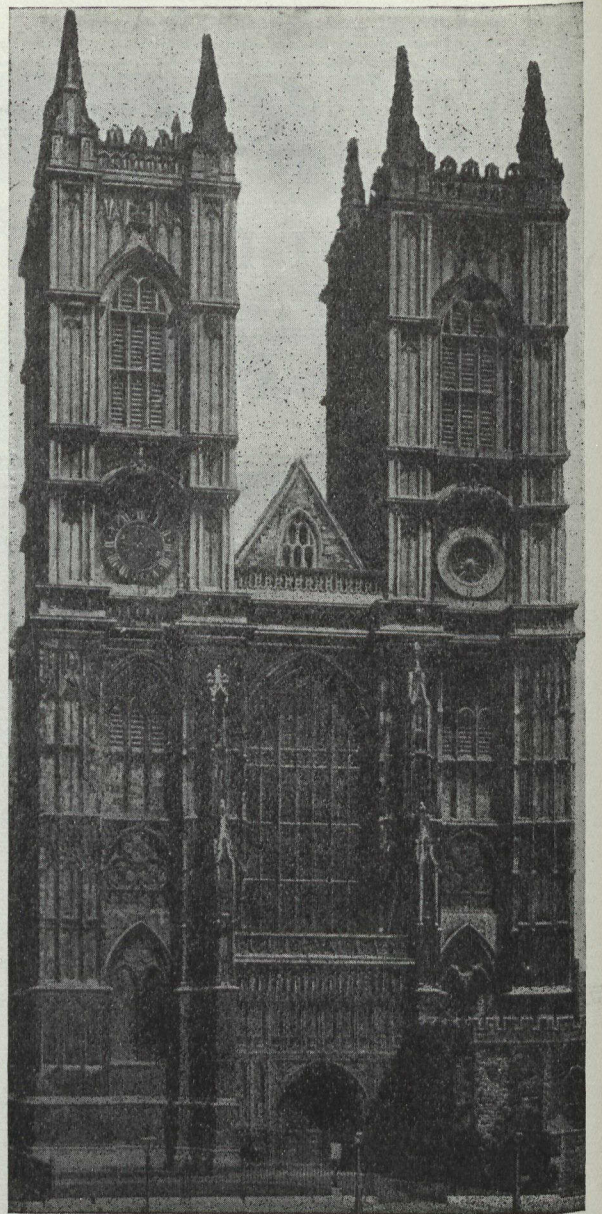
Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey a military cordon occupied each side of the way. The colonial troops were given the post of honour at Buckingham Palace, and at Queen Victoria's statue. The first soldiers seen by the King were from Canada, South Africa, and India. Representative officers from all the colonies and dependencies of the Empire marched in the procession as an advance guard to His Majesty, but the eight hundred picked men in the Canadian contingent, and their brethren from the far places of the earth, were obliged to form part of that living wall of soldiery through which the King and Queen were to pass to their crowning. The photographs of many of these bearded sons of Mars, and of the white-gloved constables of London, will remain imprinted for long enough on the mental retinue of the tired spectators who had to look down upon them from wooden balconies or from the sidewalk crush during those interminable hours.

Pending the arrival of the procession, the multitude had to be content with the splashes of colour in the uniforms in their immediate vicinity. Here stood the sumptuously caparisoned horses of the Cumberland Hussars, whose bullionned pelisse uniforms are equal to those of the Royal Horse Guards for richness of colour. In another place were the simple khaki horsemen from the Cape, whose only colour was a splash of scarlet at gorge and cuff. Across the street stood the Scottish Horse, and further on could be seen the Indian troopers mounted and turbaned, their olive faces and gleaming eyes lending a touch of barbaric magnificence to the scene. Then there were miles of foot soldiers in scarlet, brown, green, crimson, buff and faded grey. During their nine hours' vigil the soldiers of this empire army were useful in leaning back against the multitude when that hydra-headed source of energy became too enthusiastic and threatened to spill over into the street; but the main purpose which they served was decorative. They supplied two lines of gorgeous colour from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey.

As for other decorations there were the inevitable Venetian masts, with fluttering bridges of pennants along Piccadilly, and an abundance of bunting and streamers along the faces of the grey, old walls which looked down upon the surging streets below. The noble and imposing thoroughfare leading from Nelson's Monument to the Abbey was in the nature of things the most beautifully decorated portion of the route. As the result of a month's toil on the part of a large force of artists, Whitehall and Parliament Street displayed sixty-four fibrous plastered columns facing one another at intervals of twenty-five feet. These graceful, white columns were surmounted by bronzed Corinthian capitals holding gilded symbolical figures. The larger terminal columns at the corners of streets were surmounted by gilded lions holding shields which bore the arms of Westminster. On the other alternative columns stood the figures of angels with trumpets of triumph to their lips. On the columns again were heraldic griffins rampant. The effect of these rows of columns, which were further adorned with bronzed chaplets, was stately and imposing in the extreme.

## Ambitious Decorations.

New Zealand and Ontario were responsible for the most ambitious of all the decorations on the line of march. That progressive little country in the southern seas had expended her art and loyalty on a beautiful triumphal arch which contained medalion representations of the kings and queens of England from the time of William the Conqueror. Nearer to the Abbey, on either side of the refuges in the centre of Whitehall, opposite Downing Street, stood two detached pylons erected by the Ontario Government in testimony of devotion to King and Empire. Away back in the illustrious era of the Caesars the Roman general newly returned from Parthia or Germany led his triumphal procession to the capitol between such pylons. Each Ontario pylon was forty feet in height, and consisted of a base ten foot high surmounted by Corinthian columns, and a full entablature surrounded by groups of statuary symbolic of agriculture and prosperity. On one pylon the group showed an Ontario farmer shearing sheep, and on the other the corona-



The Place of Coronation.

tion millions beheld a figure of prosperity, seated on wheat sheaves, and holding a cornucopia, from which the fruits of Ontario were being poured out. On the side of each pylon stood devices representing the arms of Ontario in heraldic colours. Across the frieze of each pylon the multitude read the magic name "Ontario," inscribed in letters of gold. A further magnificent effect was obtained by the erection of two masts, each forty feet high, and silver grey green in colour, designed to support each pylon. Each mast bore a wreath of wheat near the top, and suspended beneath was a pennant bearing the arms of Ontario. At the top of each mast, and setting off the whole, a golden crown shone resplendent.

Surmounting all these decorations and eclipsing them all, in point of human interest at least, were the numerous stands erected by civic corporations, government departments, speculative contractors, and private individuals. In Trafalgar Square, at Charing Cross, along Whitehall, and in the vicinity of Westminster Abbey, these vast structures, gay with all manner of flags and coloured cloth, were loaded with those eager thousands of America and Europe, unfortunate in not having gained entrance to the Abbey, but happy in having the necessary guineas to be lifted up above the *hoi polloi* and adorned in festal attire and supplied with costly cates and viands. Next in interest to the procession itself were these serried masses of richly-dressed spectators, who filled the immense stands which extended from the Parliament Buildings across Palace Yard, which enveloped St. Margaret's Church so that the edifice could not be seen, which stretched in many a glittering curve almost to the Abbey door. When it is remembered that there were in London that day 100,000 Americans, 10,000 Canadians, 10,000 Australians, and 5,000 visitors from other colonies, to say nothing of the great numbers of people from France and Germany, the display of the world's fashion by this aggregation of wealth and beauty may be imagined; it cannot be described. "London," as the author of *Lothair* wrote, "is a roost for every bird." The roosts were occupied by birds of paradise.

The happy thousands who had procured seats amidst this vast acreage of timber were constrained by police regulations to occupy their coigns of vantage before eight o'clock in the morning. The

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