

ship in the thirteenth century was the fact that, on the accession of Henry III's son, the great Edward I, the commencement of the reign was dated, not from the new King's coronation, as theretofore, but from his father's death. As a matter of fact, Edward was abroad at the time of his father's death, and did not return to England till nearly four years afterwards. But, all that time, 'the King's writ was running' (as contemporary lawyers would have said), that is, the royal officials were pursuing malefactors, deciding cases, maintaining the King's Peace, and generally, acting in the King's name, as though under the King's personal orders. Thus the dangers of an 'interregnum' were avoided; and thus the doctrine became true: 'The King is dead; long live the King.'

THE KING AS AN INSTITUTION

Thus the first three-quarters of the thirteenth century had already worked two great changes which are at the foundation of constitutional Kingship. First, they had made the King, not merely an individual ruler, but an *institution*, that is, an arrangement or system which goes on independently of the actual occupant of the throne, and is capable of lasting for ever. One great result of this change was that each new King, as he ascended the throne, found himself face to face with a body of law and tradition which set bounds to his personal will, though he had never personally agreed to accept it. It is well known, that this feature of Kingship, which seems so natural to us, was not acknowledged in Western Europe till towards the end of that vague period which we call the Middle Ages. Charles the Great and his descendants, for example, never admitted that they were bound by their predecessors' 'charters,' or promises, unless they had themselves confirmed them. And we can see traces of this idea lingering on, even after