

THE BUSINESS OF BEING A KING

CROWN LANDS THAT YIELD NOTHING TO THE KING

By "A Court Historian."

Our well-informed contributor here continues his interesting description of the multitudinous duties and responsibilities of King George.

No. 4—MANAGING THE ROYAL ESTATES.

It is a fond illusion of childhood, that a King is the richest man in his kingdom. If such a belief has ever had a basis of fact in this country, it must be long, long ago. Indeed, it would seem that the kings with the largest incomes were the biggest borrowers. The more they had, the greater difficulty they had in making ends meet. They resorted to loans, and were not above pledging valuable treasures—treasures which, sometimes, were not strictly their own. If modern kings are poorer, the legend of their wealth persists, like the myth of a London paved with gold. It is pretty, and it does but little harm.

There are actually several scores of his subjects who are far richer than King George, and many more who receive a far larger annual income.

There is also this difference. Whereas his subjects may spend their money as they please, the King may not. His freedom of the purse is almost entirely restricted to what may literally be described as "pocket money." Officials guard the Privy Purse, officials watch over the Royal housekeeping accounts, and

officials take care that the rapidly increasing revenues from Crown property do not benefit His Majesty.

When it was recently reported that the ground rents from Crown property in the neighborhood of the rebuilt Regent street in the west-end of London had increased by some sixty thousand pounds, it was rashly assumed by many people that this was "good for the King." One fiery literary commentator on finance from an extremist standpoint, actually made these increases the text for an attack on the heavy cost of Royalty. Evidently he had not troubled to make enquiries, or perhaps he foresaw that it might be inconvenient for his purpose to do so. There have been handsome increases in the value of Crown lands and Royal estates of late years, but the benefits have gone wholly to the State. The King himself is a poorer man than when he ascended the Throne.

It is unnecessary here to catalogue the increases in the cost of living which have occurred during and since the war. Most people are actually aware of them, and they are aware, too, that the increases in income, which almost everyone in the realm has received, are not sufficient to balance the advance in expenditure. The King, however, though the increased cost of everything has affected him in common with his subjects, has never received even a penny increase in his annual State in-

come on the amount voted for his needs in the year 1914.

The Two Duchies.

With the exception of the two duchies, and a few unimportant private properties, the entire revenue from Crown lands now passes into the national exchequer. It was a bargain made by George III. that he should waive his interest in these lands, in return for a fixed income from the civil list. At the time it was made, the bargain was not very promising for the State, for much of the property handed over had been neglected, and values were depreciated. Succeeding monarchs renewed the undertaking, but it was not until towards the end of the reign of King Edward that a new policy towards the Crown estates was initiated. Improvements were effected in a few selected places, to the advantage of the revenue. But we owe to King George and his advisers the bold policy by which the Crown properties are now so rapidly rising to their proper market value. Schemes of reconstruction were taken in hand; agricultural lands were developed on modern lines. As stewards of the old school, with ineradicable objections to change, passed away, their places were taken by keen business men trained in estates management, and alive to the value of enterprise. The interest and inspiration of the King in all this were nobly unselfish. What was an indifferent bargain when made with George III. has become, under King George V., a very wonderful bargain, and the State is the gainer.

Only the two Duchies continue to be a private source of income to the King and the Prince of Wales. The Duchy of Lancaster is virtually under the direction of the Chancellor, appointed as a member of the Government of the day, but the Duchy of Cornwall is administered by Royal officials having under them a staff of local stewards. A few years ago, the estates within the Duchy of Cornwall consisted largely of deserted castles, derelict mines and lands which were not cultivated to the best effect. All this has been changed. The Prince has taken the liveliest interest in his Duchy, and, on his visits, has made it his business thoroughly to explore the possibilities of the estates. The whole of Cornwall has progressed since he took this step, and the increased revenue from the Duchy has coincided with a rise in values for all surrounding properties.

The broad domains which once belonged to the King and yielded their whole income to the Sovereign, continue to be called Crown property. It would be more correct to call it State property, for His Majesty is only an indirect beneficiary. The entire income and expenditure is supervised by four great departments of State. These are the Customs and Excise, the Inland Revenue, the Post Office and the Commissioners of Woods and Forests. Tenants or occupiers of Crown lands have to pay their rentals and other charges directly to one of these offices, or through accredited representatives. These are the officials who adjust grievances and make terms; their duty is also the task to recover arrears. All money so received is paid into the account, at the Bank of England, of the Consolidated Fund of the United Kingdom, which simply means that it is credited to the British taxpayer, and not to the King.

As though, at some time, astute politicians feared that a wilful and impoverished Sovereign might find a means of diverting these handsome revenues to his own purposes, they were fenced about with forms and ceremonies which must seem amusing to subjects of King George. The fiction of Royal pleasure is preserved, but the real voice is the voice of Westminster. No great business house could so effectually protect its banking account.

If it is desired to draw out some portion of the revenue from the Crown estates, the recommendation is presented to the King, who signifies his Royal Pleasure. This is an echo of the days when the estates were actually yielding their return to the Privy Purse. But the next step reasserts the bargain concluded with George III., for application is made to Parliament for the required amounts. Once again, we have recourse to the Royal prerogative, for the will of Parliament is conveyed to the King through the Privy Council, whereupon His Majesty is advised to issue authority for payment, from the fund, of the amount specified. Not even then is the money released. The King must empower the Lords of the Treasury to receive from the Auditor-General a demand on the exchequer account at the Bank of England. The money is then passed over to the Paymaster-General, who, in his turn, allocates it as explicitly directed by Parliament.

Watching the Bills. All income and expenditure from Crown estates is subject to official audit. Only the moneys of the Privy Purse are audited at the pleasure of the King, and such audit is, of course, a private affair. But King George is meticulously careful in money matters, and accounts are kept with business-like minuteness. The office of Woods and Forests fills important functions in connection with Crown estates, for it has tasks of supervision as well as of revenue collection, but the office of Works takes a larger share in connection with the Royal palaces. The Queen may exercise her feminine right, and plan her own Royal spring cleaning, but if alterations are involved, they will be carried out on the advice of the Commissioner of Works, and the Royal purse will be protected by the vigilance of this office over the estimates. The King

desires a new door or the slight replanning of the ground before his Royal home. His subjects may make such changes as they will. Lucky subjects! His Majesty may not. His private secretary conveys his wishes to the office of Works, and there appears on the scene an architect who must plan such alteration so that it does not impair the amenities of the Palace. Estimates are submitted, and then the King is invited to approve his own desire.

For some years improvements have been urgently necessary in the Royal mews at Buckingham Palace, to provide more garage accommodation and better quarters for the domestic staff. These plans, however, the King has pigeon-holed until such time as the demand for labor on working-class houses has diminished. This is typical of other problems confronting His Majesty. He considers issues which some of his wealthy subjects can, and do, ignore.

The actual salary for the King comes by way of the civil list. These payments are annually reviewed by Parliament, but it is a matter of tactful consideration for the dignity of the monarch that they are seldom questioned. The list has had the approval of the King in advance. The present grant for the privy purse amounts to £110,000 a year, and His Majesty is absolutely free to spend this as he pleases. The keeper of the privy purse looks after the account in the interests of his Sovereign, but rather as a friendly auditor who checks the expenditure to ensure that the King has received honest value.

But the vote of funds is deceptive, and open to misconception, because it exaggerates the income of the King. There must be deducted the numerous and generous donations made by King George to charitable objects which touch his heart. These are never the subject of consultation. Whenever His Majesty sends a cheque to a hospital or philanthropic institution, he does so of his own freewill. Individual cases of hardship or suffering are also constantly helped. And there has not been a single Royal visit of late years, without Their Majesties making cash gifts. There is no available record of this chain of good works, but we are assured that it has exhausted a considerable share of the privy purse. Special grants are made for Royal tours, but these by no means cover the whole of the expenses. In the course of each tour there arise appeals which touch His Majesty, and which can only be met from his private pocket.

The King's Economy Axe. There is one other source of income, and that is the exclusively Royal estates. They are controlled by their stewards, but His Majesty takes a very active part and is known to practically every tenant. Attached to Sandringham, Balmoral and Windsor are numerous farms and cottages. Several thousand pounds have been spent by His Majesty in recent years in modernising the homes of his loving neighbors and tenants, and in improving the farms. There is not one atom left on the Royal estates, and not one out-of-date farm. But it will not be King George who will reap the benefit of his passion for improvement. Consequently, although the income from these Royal estates is his personal right and subject to no public supervision, it can be stated with authority that the present yield makes an insignificant addition to the King's income.

Shortly after the war, it became evident to the King that the increased cost of everything made a reorganization of his finances necessary. Not only that, but it was obvious, too, that he must effect some drastic economies without delay. To advise him on the subject, the King called in the late Lord Farquhar, then Lord Steward of the Household. Lord Farquhar had advised King Edward very wisely on a similar subject, and King George had the greatest confidence in his judgment.

The Lord Steward drew up a balance sheet showing the exact position, and the King and he went over it together. Economies were undoubtedly necessary, and, with characteristic self-sacrifice, the King brought down the "axe" first of all upon the relaxation he most enjoys, namely, yachting. From that, he went to racing, and his stable expenditure was severely pruned. And so on, setting an example of courageous economy by cutting down the unessential things.

In the result, he effected a saving of £10,000 per annum, but it meant foregoing many of those pleasures which provide some little compensation for the tremendous responsibilities he bears. To-day, in consequence of Lord Farquhar's advice and his own prompt action upon it, the King's financial position is much improved, and the nation continues to pay but a small price for the monarch's noble and unselfish service.

Next Week—"Royalty at the Counter."

Toy Theatre Again Popular. In Europe the toy theatre has again taken hold of the popular fancy, with the result that there are some interesting offerings being made. The smart set of London is back of it. The entertainment is given by means of miniature toy actors manipulated by strings. It is a far cry from the days of the manipulated Punch and Judy shows, as even Shakespearean dramas are being given in these modern toy theatres.

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