



Joe Bartlett

The Coronation Is Haunted

One of his majesty's subjects says three ghosts will be present: P. T. Barnum's and those of two revolutions

By T. A. Jackson

IT is no good you folks thinking everybody in Britain has gone plain daft—except insofar as they didn't have to go. Our coronation carry-on isn't anything like as daft as it looks.

Bernard Shaw years ago let the world into the secret. Arguing from the cases cited by Darwin of protective mimicry in nature, he advanced the theory that the inconceivable imbecility and general cretinism exhibited by the middle and ruling classes in Britain were to be explained likewise. It was their mode of luring their prey within grasping range.

Naturally, coming as it does from an Irishman, the theory must not be taken too literally. But there is a good deal of truth in it. For instance: from a rational standpoint what excuse is there for taking the unfortunate chief magistrate of a front-rank state and putting him through a ceremonial lasting for a couple of hours of such a nature as would tax the strength of a heavyweight champion trained to the minute?

They carry him through the streets in a coach of a design that was about up to date when Queen Anne died—a design invented when the immortal fathers of your republic had none of them been born—when the parents of those immortal fathers were biting chunks out of Plymouth Rock in preparation for busting chunks off the British empire. They get the king into the Abbey Church at Westminster; put him on a platform; make him kneel down; stand up; kneel down again;

give the right answers to a set of riddles; half undress him; grease his chest; decorate him with robes weighing all-told about ninety pounds; put a jeweled pot on his head; and tell him he is, now, the finished article. Then the archbishop asks him to contribute to the collection.

After the same performance has been gone through in the case of the queen, with modifications—they don't undress her so much, and she doesn't get so much greasing, or so big a crown; *per contra* isn't asked to contribute to the kitty—he has to sit while representatives of the peers present go through the ceremony of rendering homage to him as their "liege lord of life and limb."

A little comic business with a couple of swords, one with no point and another with no edge, an orb and a couple of scepters (with which he doesn't do any neat juggling, because even if he had learned how he would, by then, be past it), he ought by rights to listen to a sermon. Out of deference to the modern craving for speed, the sermon has, this time, been cut out.

Then they take him home again, wearing the robes and the crown, and bowing all the way in acknowledgment of the cheers of the loyal and enthusiastic populace.

This king of ours is in luck—he has some hair! I can testify from personal observation of his father and his grandfather in similar circumstances that there is no more terrible dilemma in life than that of a bald-headed king

trying to calculate just how much of a bow he can manage without dislodging his crown and sending it over one eye or an ear. One of these days, when we at last allow an heir to the throne to be begotten on the body of an American woman, we shall have a king who solves the difficulty either (a) by anchoring the crown on his head with a wad of well-chewed gum, or (b) by waving it out of the coach-window on the end of his scepter.

As it is he must go through with it, bowing continually as the coach proceeds at a walking pace the longest way round they can invent from the Abbey to his home. After that he can change into pajamas.

YOU THINK all this is just plain damfoolery? Not a bit of it. It is made to look like that on purpose. But every stroke on it is as calculated and designed as every call in a poker game.

Take the ceremony itself. Basically its substratum is primitive ritual-magic—an example of what the anthropologists call a "rite of transition." By this ceremony, ritually speaking, an ordinary mortal man is magically converted into something more than man—into a king! In its aboriginal substratum, the ceremony did more than that—it converted a plain man into a triune being who was king, high priest, and god incarnate, all at once.

Relics of the second and third of these functions still remain. The king is *ex-officio* head of the church. And "the divinity that doth

hedge a king" is not wholly a mere figure of speech. But out of deference to the clericalists and the Bibliolators, those aspects are soft-pedaled. They give him a Bible along with the rest of his kit, and he promises to make a real fuss of it. This sidetracks the Fundamentalists, as his solemn promise to look after the church (and its revenues) sidetracks the Clericals.

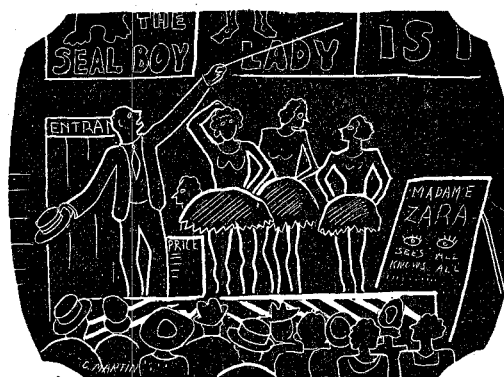
But superimposed upon this basic ritual-magic stratum of the Coronation ceremony is the ceremony of *electing* the leader of a feudal-military host of conquerors. As part of the ceremony the assembled peers are *asked* if they accept "this man, George, etc.," as their king. There is no telling what would happen if any peer, being in drink or otherwise smitten with a spirit of devilment, should say "No!" It is, now, a mere formality. But it does survive as a relic from the time when the leaders of conquering hosts were elected to their office of war-leader by their "peers"—that is to say, their "equals."

There is a two-edged purpose in preserving this feudal relic. In the first place, it creates the pleasing illusion that the king only took on the job with great reluctance out of deference to the pleadings of "his people." In the second place, it subtly suggests the republican contention that it is the people who make, and who therefore have the right to dismiss, the king. Also, and arising out of the latter aspect, it suggests that the "peers" are really and truly the natural and proper spokesmen for and champions of the rights of the people.

There is a cunning here that it would be hard to underestimate. You, in your republic, think it is all nonsense to pretend that by calling a man a "lord" you make him anything other than a plain man. The ruling class of Britain, wise with the experience of centuries of dealing with a people who were once notorious as the most intractable and rebellious in Europe, knows that there is a subtle dialectic involved in a man who is both a plain man and also, at the same time, more than a man, a "lord" or a "king."

You see, the core of the whole business consists in a wholesome fear of what the common people, the plain working folk, might do if once they decided really and truly to look after themselves. Thus, allowing for the natural diffidence of each man taken separately, there is an amazing political efficacy in creating an institution which suggests to each of these diffident ones that he needn't bother—there is a power already provided which will take care of him better than he could possibly take care of himself. And the more the status of "lord" and "king" is surrounded with a halo of time-sanctified tradition and customary usage, the more efficacious it is for the purpose of inhibiting all determination in the people—in the workers as a class—to take into their own hands the decision of their own destinies.

For instance, these "lords." In your country everybody knows Henry Ford, and "the nail and saucepan business as he made his money by." Our English Henry Ford, when he has made his pile, hides the origin of that



C. Martin

pile, skillfully, by becoming metamorphosed into Lord Nuffield. When you read of a mass strike at the Beardmore works in Glasgow, and the press carries a story of how deeply Lord Clydebank deplores the loss to the nation involved in this calamitous interruption of essential production, you will be all the more impressed the less you know that Lord Clydebank is none other than old man Beardmore himself. When, at the Coronation, you hear of the part played by Lord Devonport, you may, if you don't know, envisage him as the latest link of a chain of noble and chivalrous ancestors stretching back beyond the Conqueror to King Arthur and the Round Table. It makes a difference if you happen to know that the first Lord Devonport started in the tea business and finished by building a dock-and-harbor trust that had to be bought out by the state as a front-rank public nuisance. Similarly, under the title of Lord Allerton, is discreetly veiled the memory of his father, a railway boss known to his employees as Bloody Bill Jackson. And so on.

You think you are cute in the U.S.A., and on points so you are. But, as the literature of your country should have taught you, "you've got to get up early to get in front of God." And even God stands a poor chance when the British ruling class sets out really on the make.

YOU SEE, the British ruling class has one great virtue. It knows how to learn. And it has learned a lot from the U.S.A.

Would it surprise you to know that it is to a large extent the U.S.A. which is to blame for our forthcoming coronation ballyhoo? No, I am not, wholly, thinking of Wally Simpson—though she, certainly, gave them a reason for laying on the flappedoodle with an extra-large-size trowel. (You can't sack a king quicker than a boss would sack an errand-boy without running some risk of shaking the foundations of the monarchical superstition.) I go further back than that and affirm that the whole cult of royalism and aristocracy in Britain is a relatively modern manufacture, and that its initial impetus came from the fright received by the rulers of Britain at the revolt of the American colonies and the foundation of the United States of America. I affirm it as my profound conviction that if the revolt of the American colonies had been delayed for ten years, Britain might easily have

become a republic first! That the alarm excited among the waverers by that revolt added to the extra circumspection induced in the ruling oligarchy by that revolt made all the difference at a critical moment.

Even if this be an exaggeration, the fact stands clear that ever since the American Revolution, and its logical consequence, the French Revolution, the British ruling class has been extra-supersensitive to the possibility of revolt among the "lower orders," and has taken extra precautions both to have available a force for crushing such a revolt, should it ever break out, and to anticipate its possibility by systematic neutralizing propaganda.

You see this most clearly when you notice that the pageantry indulged in on such occasions as coronations and jubilees has grown steadily more elaborate and more designed to win the populace over to the side of faith and trust in royalty and all that it signifies.

Until the twentieth century, for instance, the coronation ceremonial was confined wholly to the Abbey pantomime. Only in the cases of Edward VII, George V, and now George VI, was there added the elaborate military parade through streets lavishly decorated at the public expense for the occasion. This public parade, which at one time consisted of no more than a passage of the king, attended by a company of guards and the gentlemen of his court, from the palace of Whitehall or St. James's to the Abbey, less than half a mile away, was first elaborated as a technique on the occasion of Queen Victoria's first jubilee in 1887. On the occasion of her second jubilee in 1897, it was enlarged enormously to include not only representative companies of every branch of the armed forces of the crown—infantry lining the streets, and cavalry and horse artillery in the procession itself—but also a special colonial procession in which contingents from the armed forces of every British dependency or possession—including the Fiji Island police, as well as the Royal Irish Constabulary—formed an extra-super guard of honor under the command of Field-Marshal Lord Roberts in person.

For the coronation of George VI, preparations have been made to include all the special features of Queen Victoria's Second Jubilee plus the most elaborate coronation pageant yet designed. And that the public may be properly prepared to respond to the display, the whole advertising talent of the British Empire (reinforced especially from the U.S.A.) has been mobilized. That fine twentieth-century technique which has filled every home with breakfast foods—for offering which to our ancestors men would have been, and deservedly, hanged to the nearest tree—and which has made us all self-conscious about our collars, our socks, our shaving, and (sublimest touch of all) our B. O., is being developed to the uttermost in order to convince every last guttersnipe in the British islands and the British dominions beyond the seas that the British empire is the greatest show on earth and its king the grandest king in the king-line ever revealed to the gaze of a wondering mortality.

And don't you run away with the idea that the whole business is just plumb dumb. In the days when "Hopkins and that crew" (as a noble lord called them) were founding the U.S.A., and, indeed, more than forty years later, when George IV was crowned, in 1820, they simply would not have dared to parade the king through miles of streets. Their "loyal and devoted subjects" had a way of being dexterous with brickbats and garbage.

Round about the year 1870 it was the common belief that Queen Victoria would be the last monarch to occupy the throne of Britain. Today—! Well, watch for yourself.

YOU SEE, the rulers of Britain were cute enough to see what they were up against, and they acted accordingly. They had one big asset in the fact that Victoria was not only a widow, but essentially as petty-bourgeois as they made 'em. No small-town tradesman's relict ever wore her widow's weeds with such a relish as did Victoria. No deacon's widow was ever so quintessentially respectable. Her

efficient and punctual fecundity as a wife, combined with her adamantine hostility to all the cardinal sins—save possible gluttony-on-the-sly—made her ideally fitted for convincing every strait-laced petty bourgeois in the land that she was "just like one of us."

In the U.S.A. you manage very well by means of the "log cabin to the White House" myth. In Britain our rulers go one better by promulgating the myth that the heart that beats in Balmoral Castle or in Buckingham Palace is secretly pining for a back parlor, and holds its yearnings in check only out of self-sacrificing deference to the duty of serving the nation.

Wally Simpson very nearly knocked this myth end-ways-on. She was only just stopped in time. But she was stopped. And nothing stopped her more effectively than the fact that there was handy, as an alternative to Wally's man, an ideal Young Couple, with two really delightfully (almost Shirley-Temple-like) young children. Wally's man was paid off and got rid of. And all the advertising ex-

perts set to work to sell to the British public the cutest outfit in royal families that the country was ever blessed with.

Please note the cunning two-sidedness of the whole baloney. First of all the king (and family) are boosted as just plain folks—"like ourselves." That is not only the human-interest pull. It is a cunning way of suggesting that really, he'd rather not have all this fuss if it could be avoided. Which in him brings into view the other aspect—that after all he is the Head of the Greatest Empire that the World Ever Saw ("our" empire), so that in making a fuss over him we are really making a fuss over our "empire," which ultimately means "ourselves."

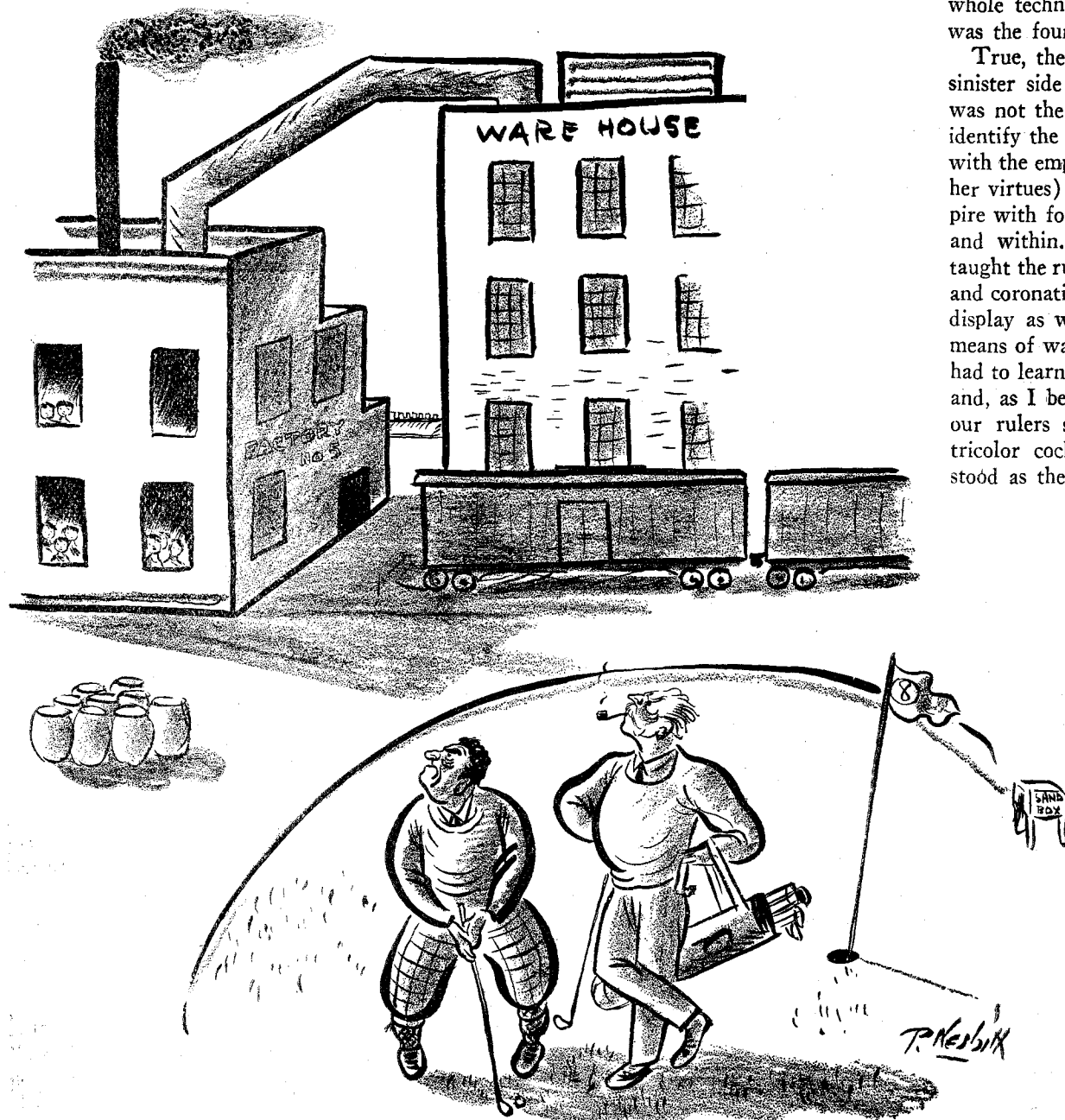
I BLAME the U.S.A. You cannot study the technique of selling royalism to the British public without realizing from the outset how much the rulers of Britain owe to that great man Phineas T. Barnum (who said "there's a sucker born every minute," and who invented "The Greatest Show on Earth") and to the whole technique of salesmanship of which he was the founder.

True, the U.S.A. is not responsible for the sinister side of the coronation pageantry. It was not the U.S.A. which taught Disraeli to identify the queen (and her domestic virtues) with the empire, and loyalty to the queen (and her virtues) with the need to defend that empire with force and arms against foes without and within. It was not the U.S.A. which taught the rulers of Britain how to use jubilees and coronations as occasions of such a military display as would make them invaluable as a means of war preparation. These your rulers had to learn from ours. But it was the U.S.A. and, as I believe, P. T. Barnum, who taught our rulers such tricks as that of using the tricolor cockade, which, to my grandfather, stood as the symbol of jacobinism and republicanism—symbol of the two

greatest revolutions till then known, the American and the French—as the symbol of monarchism and something peculiarly British.

Will our rulers get away with it? On the surface, yes. The press will see to it that there is the largest and most enthusiastic crowd ever—and, for that matter, as a spectacle it will undoubtedly out-Barnum Barnum's best. But under the surface? Who can say?

This is a funny country in many ways. In some ways Wally Simpson has helped to make a far bigger crack in the foundations of the royalist hokey-pokey than is as yet apparent. 'Twould be funny if a stick of lipstick proved an agency for turning the whole British empire "Red." But it is not impossible.



"Something must be done about those mill kids, J. M. They're adding six strokes a year to my score."

P. Nesbitt