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DECEMBER 19, 1936

ABDICATION—

Love Sways The Stern Course of Empire



Mrs. Simpson Waited in France . . .

A half billion persons discovered their monarch was only a man and the result was a reverberation last week that shook the British Empire.

Along the whole globe-girdling line of British possessions (13 million square miles) went the tremors resulting from the struggle between a king and the outraged pillars of society over one slim, dark-haired woman.

The issue was a love affair whose implications were probably unlike any other in modern history.

The man was Edward VIII, "By the Grace of God, of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions Beyond the Seas King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India," who was trained from infancy to the royal role he would have to play.

The woman was Mrs. Wallis Warfield Simpson whose girlhood home was a boarding house off Baltimore's Biddle street. She was an American girl who played hopscotch with the neighbors' children, whose only claim to attention was a gay laugh and soft, brown eyes, who grew up to marry and divorce an American naval officer, repeat the process with a British ship broker and then rock a throne and the 1,000-year-old British Constitution.

Part of the situation, a few details of the relationship between King and commoner, was known in the United States months ago. But Britain and the Dominions, for the most part, were unaware of the growing crisis as the British press rigidly restrained all mention of the romance.

Then, one morning, it happened. The story had grown too large, the ramifications too critical. On startled British eyes burst the news. Their king who had mounted the throne less than a year ago, a beloved figure, praised on all sides, was considering abdication—for a woman, an alien, a

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ABDICATION



And Edward VIII Stepped Down . . .

commoner and to many, worst of all, a woman twice divorced.

The news was stunning. Business reacted violently. The English stock market dropped as concern was felt whether this would mean resignation of the Cabinet or abdication of the King. The price of sterling declined as gold was shipped to the United States when the course of business became uncertain. Merchants who had laid in huge stores on the assumption the coronation of Edward was to be held on schedule May 12, 1937, were panic-stricken.

It had been thought everything was in readiness for the formal crowning of Edward. The Coronation Court of Claims had met and settled the claims of nobles and commoners for certain functions in the ceremony. Attention had been directed at external affairs. Then, everything was changed. Cabinet ministers raced to 10 Downing street, traditional residence of the Prime Minister, as growing crowds gathered outside and made known their views in vociferous fashion.

For days the ministers wrangled. Anxious pleas from Queen Mary, his mother, his brothers, and Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin were addressed to Edward. The crop of rumors grew thicker. Headlines throughout the world guessed one decision after anoanother. Question marks loomed larger. What would Edward do?

Finally his decision was made public to the tense House of Commons. The King chose to abdicate!

With the enlightenment of the people most concerned came bewilderment to those unfamiliar with the political and social organization of Great Britain.

The King was a figurehead, was he not? Without real power, was he not? Yet the House of Commons and the British Cabinet turned its attention from all the serious foreign developments pressing the nation. If the government were a democratic one, why was the situation involving a mere symbol assuming the proportions of a constitutional crisis?

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As His Mother Watched, Grieving

The answers lay deep in the roots of British character and tradition. The British government is democratic but the King fills an important place. Great Britain has no written constitution, but it is a complete, living document.

For the British Constitution exists, not as does the American Constitution in written form, easy of access in almost any textbook. It is, rather, a code, some items written into law, part of it merely traditional rules of procedure, and all as formidable and as bulwarked by the weight of the British judiciary as is the United States Constitution by the Supreme Court.

As for the King, he is irreplaceable, according to the lights of the practical, prosaic men who run the British Empire. A famed commentator on the British Constitution, Walter Bagehot, has pointed out that the King gives "a vast strength to the entire Constitution by enlisting on its behalf the credulous obedience of enormous masses."

In other words, the pomp and fanfare of the royal household is purposeful and vital to keep in line the hordes of simple colonial peoples who cannot visualize abstractions but can be swayed by a majestic symbol.

When the first astounding import of the announcement of abdication had subsided, cooler heads reasoned that no other course had been open. Edward's value as a nominal sovereign had been marred by his too-human qualities. His ministers reasoned that the credulity of the masses was shattered when the monarch was found to be not above the masses but of them and subject to the same human emotions.

Too, the ministers and strict constitutionalists took the view that if Edward had successfully defied his Parliament-appointed ministers in one instance, he could and would have done it again, leaving the way open to absolutism or dictatorship.

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There are historical precedents for almost every aspect both actual and speculative of the situation. Ever since monarchies began, rulers have abdicated to follow a loved one. Long before England was known, a certain Marc Antony lost his place in the Third Triumvirate of Rome because of a romance with a certain Cleopatra.

A thousand years ago, in England, King Edwy the Fair was forced to abdicate after he had refused to give up a cousin, Ethelgiva, whom he had married without going through the necessary formalities. Henry II, who reigned from 1154 to 1189, left his throne suddenly after his queen, Eleanore, expressed displeasure at his relations with Joan Clifford, later to be immortalized by poets as the "Fair Rosamond."

The King John who signed the Magna Charta while on the throne from 1199 to 1216 was excommunicated after divorcing his first wife and taking a second. Pope Innocent III excommunicated him and because of religious views at that time, John left the throne.

By 1688, when the religious temper of Great Britain had changed, James II was forced out for marrying a Catholic, Mary Beatrice. He was succeeded by William of Orange and his queen, Mary, both Protestants.

A parallel to the clash between King and government existed in the reign of King Richard II in the 14th century. The constitutional issue was the same—whether the King could rule without the advice of his ministers. This King was but 14 years old. His Parliament censured the peace he had arranged with France, which provided for his wedding to Isabella, seven-year-old daughter of Charles VI of France. Many years later, Richard was forced to abdicate and died in prison.

Another earlier crisis was precipitated by the secret marriage of George IV, as Prince of Wales, to Mrs. Fitzherbert in 1785. This, termed a common-law marriage, led to grave troubles when, as King George, he officially married the Princess of Brunswick without bothering to dissolve the secret marriage.

It is regarded as likely that those who objected to Edward's union with Mrs. Simpson will view his successor, the Duke of York, with more favor. Now the order of succession, unless the Duke should have a male heir, will be his nine-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, and his six-year-old daughter, Margaret Rose.

But even the accession of this shy, reserved, second son of King George V can not make all well within the British Empire. Indeed, no matter which course Edward had chosen, it was held likely that damage would have been done.

To have made Mrs. Simpson his Queen would have split public opinion

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wide open and unity, at this time when Europe is viewed as moving ever closer to war, is needed above all.

Furthermore, the reaction of the Dominions might well have been so violent as to disrupt every binding tie. Deep concern has already been expressed over the tendency of the Dominions—particularly Australia and Canada—to drift from the home moorings. It was felt that the purely emotional reverence which the Dominions have for the throne would have been seriously diminished if a foreigner-commoner-divorcee were to be the wife of the sovereign.

If he had refused either to abdicate or to give up Mrs. Simpson, the resignation of the Baldwin cabinet would have followed immediately. It would then have been up to Edward to form a cabinet which Parliament would support. But this was regarded as impossible and observers believed Edward would have been forced to call Baldwin back to form the cabinet on his own terms.

As if in answer to this possibility of an upsetting interval, the London Times, greatest organ of the British people, declared that "private inclinations" should not be permitted to "come into open conflict with public duty and be allowed to prevail. The high office which his Majesty holds is no man's personal posession. It is a sacred trust handed down from generation to generation and maintained for the last century with growing strength by the willing allegiance of the whole people."

This was the view of the King's family, the conservative press, Parliament, the Church and the governments of the Dominions. This was the view against which Edward struggled many days and nights before choosing.

If the King had taken what must have seemed to him the hardest step of all, renunciation of Mrs. Simpson, the results would have been almost unpredictable. But it was believed he would have been a little grimmer, a little more likely to rebel at the advice of his ministers because he had acceded to them in this demand.

What would have been left then? The King and Mrs. Simpson could never have resumed their friendship on the old basis. Until the end of her days she was bound to be a marked woman, with the light of publicity always searching her out.

But Edward chose abdication and many felt that with him went much of the color surrounding the throne as the correct but pallid Duke of York was elevated. Despite outbursts of the teeming masses of London for their ruler, despite Mrs. Simpson's offer from her refuge in France to "withdraw" from the King's life, Edward stepped down.

Now, by any standards, the British throne must have lost some measure of the stability with which it has been

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invested. For the first time in three hundred years, the House of Commons divided into Parliament men and King's men as the forces of the Prime Minister clashed with Edward's supporters under the leadership of Winston Churchill. Thus, even in the ruling party, cohesion was shattered.

It is too soon to predict accurately, but many see something gone, never to be replaced, from the tradition of the British Empire, from the aura of the throne. And that is something which is likely to have a definite effect on the future turn of events throughout the world.



Edward's Successor and His Family: the Duke and Duchess of York, with Princess-Daughters Elizabeth and Margaret Rose (left)

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