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THE POLICY OF KING EDWARD

LORD ESHER has contributed to the *Deutsche Revue* for September an article entitled "King Edward VII and Germany," in which he endeavors to explain to German readers the real character and policy of the King.

He says the view so widespread outside the British Isles that King Edward initiated the foreign policy of his country is quite imaginary. The King was much too sensible, and the *rôle* which he had to play as constitutional ruler was too clearly prescribed to permit such an idea to gain access to his mind. At all times he recognized that the determination of the policy of Great Britain was the affair of the ministers in office, and that it was for him to approve or disapprove, and then carry it out emphatically. It was the latter function which he exercised with such clearness of vision and in such a tactful manner as to win for himself not only the gratitude of his people, but the admiration of all competent judges in the whole civilized world.

The leaders in both political parties found in him not only a powerful ally, but an invincible champion of their foreign policy. The foreign policy of the ministry in office was in his eyes—what under a constitutional government should be regarded as a matter of course—the policy of the nation, and consequently the policy sanctioned by the sovereign. He never hesitated or looked back. His mental attitude greatly resembled that of Queen Victoria. If ever the complete correspondence of Lord Beaconsfield should come to light it will be evident that in the eventful years 1876-78 the attitude of Great Britain to the Eastern Question was due in a great measure to the influence of the Queen who, however, had nothing to do with the choice of the policy adopted towards Russia at this time. But as soon as she and her people were committed to it by the action of the ministry she never hesitated to put into practice what in principle had been accepted.

Moral and physical courage have always been characteristics of this royal house, and both qualities were highly developed in King Edward. When the Queen died it was said her death had been hastened by the anxieties of the Black Week in the winter of 1899-1900, and the notion has also been prevalent that the political crisis hastened the death of the King. Both statements are untrue. The Queen always believed that her army would be victorious in South Africa, and the King never doubted that he could surmount the political crisis in a peaceful manner and without harm to his prestige. In all things the fundamental trait in his character was courage. At the same time he did not like conflict. He was not only a promoter of peace, but a friend of peace.

King Edward

Above all, he was a patriot and a king, and in both capacities he deemed it his duty to watch over the honor and safety of the people whose ruler he was. He was in agreement with the majority of his people in the desire that the sea-power of Great Britain should be maintained on the high scale necessary for the defence of the country. But never would it have occurred to him to regard with feelings of envy, or irritation, or uneasiness the growing power of the German Empire. In this respect he shared the sound conviction of the large majority of the British nation, that within the four quarters of the world there is room enough for Great Britain and for Germany. His mind was free from insular prejudices, and he remained uninfluenced by the resounding words of those who saw nothing but harm in the endeavors of the other great powers to increase their fighting forces. On the other hand, he was determined that nothing should be left undone to strengthen the defensive forces of Great Britain, for he was convinced that the security of his own country against hostile invasion was the best guarantee for the peace of Europe. He was too sensible and had too great a knowledge of the world and of the commercial rivalry of the European states not to appreciate the efforts of Germany to increase her sea-power and extend her colonial enterprise.

He regarded war between Germany and England as a disaster to both nations; at the same time he was unable to regard disarmament or limitation of armaments under existing circumstances as anything but a bad dream. No one could be long in the *entourage* of the King without noticing how much he loved Germany. No one could have seen the Kaiser and the King together without remarking that the two men, notwithstanding their different temperaments and the divergence of their ideals, bore an extraordinary likeness to one another, that blood was thicker than water, and that not only mutual esteem, but genuine affection, underlay their intercourse.

Again, it is ridiculous to say that the King even suggested the *entente* with France. What he did was to accept enthusiastically the policy of the Secretaries of State, not from any hostility to Germany or any other great power, but because France now, as always, gives the keynote for European peace. Also there is no English patriot worthy of the name who does not look forward to the day when the mighty German Empire will be included in the bond of friendship which now unites England and France. The main object of such a combination would be a guarantee of the *status quo* in northern and central Europe.