

The Prince of Wales Sees Red

By T. R. Ybarra

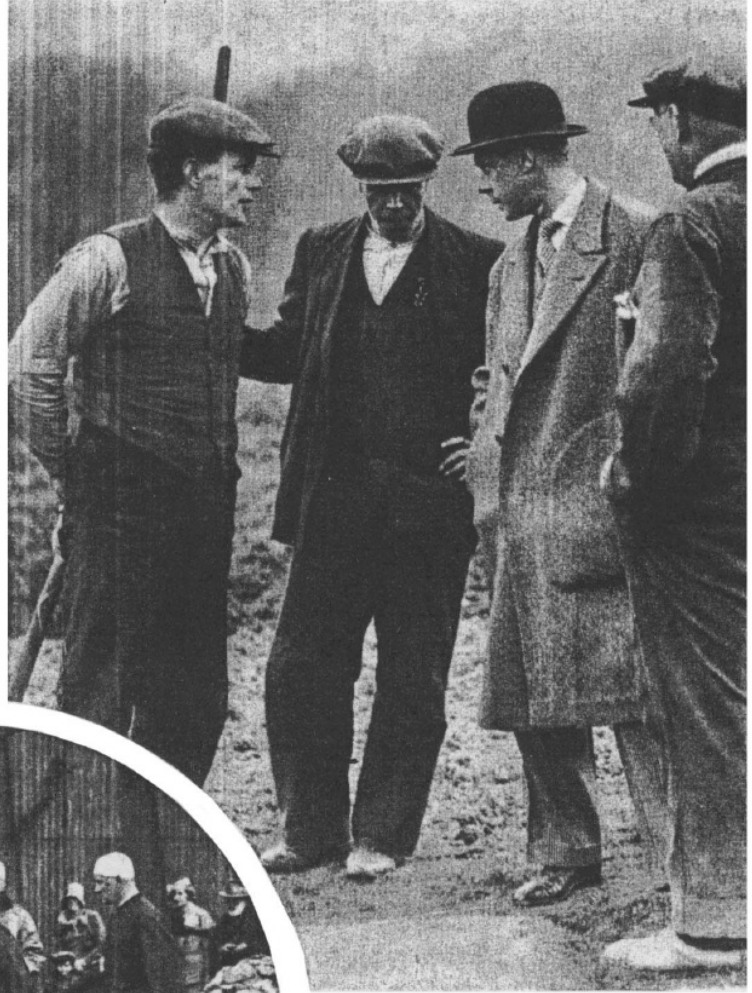
The Prince of Wales, to quote a conservative peer of the realm, day by day is getting commoner and commoner. There are even those who consider him a dangerous radical. But that doesn't bother the prince. Unperturbed, he continues to fraternize with his unennobled subjects and to defend their interests—hotly and sometimes profanely

THAT strange personage, to be found only at formal British banquets, the official with the big red ribbon hung around his neck, whose job it is to introduce British speakers before they embark upon their orations, draws himself up to his full height behind the chairman's chair, flashes a severe eye on the assembled banqueters, and majestically intones:

"Gentlemen, pray, silence—"

Glasses are set down, spoons cease tinkling against coffee cups, conversation stops abruptly along the whole length and breadth of the great banquetting-room in London's famous Guildhall; along the whole length of the tables at which are seated scores of Britons of prominence and substance—captains of industry, heads of powerful business firms, possessors of lordly titles and the lordly estates appertaining thereto.

He's deadly serious about it, is Wales, England's democratic prince, as he goes about visiting the tin mines of Cornwall and chats with the unemployed, with a view to improving their unhappy lot



ings in this country that are more than a century old. . . . They are relics of a bygone idea of what was tolerable for workmen. That type of home must be demolished. Attempts to recondition them have been futile. They are not and must not be considered fit homes for the coming generation. I personally inspected many of such places and I have been appalled that such conditions can exist in a civilized country such as ours."

Loyal cheers. Nods of approval. And yet—here and there among the listeners—stirs of uneasiness, slight frowns. After all, why bring up such horrid matters at a Guildhall banquet? The Prince of Wales should remember that some of the magnates present are owners of slum property—that British earls and dukes own slums—that the British Crown itself derives part of its revenues from the rentals of slum dwellings.

When the Landlords Squirmed

He should bear in mind that slum-dwellers are difficult persons to help; that they probably wouldn't like to live in better homes; and that, besides, to spend a lot of money in these hard times on tearing down perfectly serviceable old houses and erecting expensive new ones—

Warming up to his subject, with a spot of color in his cheeks, the Prince of Wales goes on:

"Overcrowding, associated with slum conditions, continues to exist up and down this country. There are 98,000 families, of five or more persons, living in two rooms or less. There are 23,000 dwellings, of three rooms or less, occupied by two or more families, and of four or five rooms occupied by three or more families. . . .

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"Gentlemen, pray, silence for the Prince of Wales!"

All rise to their feet. In loyal unison all acclaim the heir to the British throne. When they have sat down again, a slim man with light hair, still boyishly young in spite of the fact that he is entering upon middle age, begins to speak.

All settle themselves comfortably in their chairs. All assume, as a matter of course, that they are about to hear one of those typical speeches made to a gathering of Englishmen by a scion of England's royal family—a speech worthy but innocuous, replete with patriotism and high morality, avoiding controversial realities as a burned cat avoids a shovelful of live coals—a speech such as has resounded and been loyally applauded for generation after generation, within the walls of the Guildhall.

Instead, they listen to this:

"There are a great many slum dwell-

No cheers, no flags, no bodyguards as the heir to Britain's far-flung empire joins the gallery at the British open

"I am sure that new houses could come within the reach of the working-man if the building trade could reorganize itself somewhat and if such a big return was not looked for. . . .

"This nation cannot afford the perpetuation of the slums. No one can calculate what their cost really is. . . . Slums are radiating centers of disease, ill health and discontent. . . . What is the sense of treating slum dwellers and especially the slum children for disease and, when they are recovered, sending them back to the very center where disease is rife? To me that is an appalling process of waste, inefficiency and expense. Nor can the nation afford the moral and mental degradation which slum conditions create in those who inhabit them.

"Let public opinion awaken. . . . Every generation has a dominating social task and so let our age, our generation, be remembered as the one in which was swept away this blot that disgraces our national life."

Princely Profanity

The Prince of Wales sits down. More cheers—hearty, ringing cheers, testifying to his enormous and unimpaired popularity.

But there are doubts in the breasts of some of the banqueters. Is not the heir to the British throne going a bit too far? Cannot he stick to the harmless pattern of the Guildhall speeches of yesteryear? Cannot he pay tribute to patriotism in well-rounded sentences of an extremely lofty moral tone, instead of making his hearers squirm uncomfortably, instead of causing them to feel as if they were actually breathing into their lungs the stench of dirty slum streets and infecting themselves with the foul diseases that are rife there? Cannot the Prince of Wales—No, he cannot!

A new Prince of Wales is emerging from the Prince Charming who for so many years captivated the world with his easy manner and smiling face. That unconventional speech, made a few months ago in London's conventional Guildhall, is typical of this new prince—a serious prince, a purposeful prince, a prince unreconciled to the injustices inflicted by old traditions and unafraid of the dangers that may lurk in new doctrines. Independent to the point of rebelliousness, outspoken to the verge of audacity, so liberal as to appear, in the eyes of hidebound Britons, radical and even socialistic, this new Prince of Wales, who has just entered upon his fortieth year, is riding roughshod over prejudice and constantly worrying those ultra-conservative Britishers who have set ideas as to how royal scions should behave themselves.

Nevertheless, the Prince of Wales continues on his way. It has led him, of recent years, into wretched slums, into cheerless, tumble-down village dwellings, into the cramped and nauseating quarters in which workers in British mines and factories are compelled to make their homes. And on numerous occasions he has emerged from visits to these places—visits he might have made perfunctory and forgotten as soon as he had made them—livid and incoherent from rage. Once, not long ago, after inspecting the homes of miners in a particularly poverty-stricken section of England, he turned to the British newspaper reporters who were following close upon his footsteps and, pointing to the hovels from which he had just come, he blurted out:

"I call this sort of thing a — shame!" The adjective which he used is the coarsest and most profane in the Briton's vocabulary and, by general consent, unprintable in the British realm. Pale with anger, gathering vehemence as he progressed, the prince continued to express himself about what he had just seen—and more than once he used the aforesaid adjective and others which are fit companions for it. The reporters listened in amazement.

"And you can say that I said so!" the prince added.

But, true to the conspiracy of silence which is the most effective bulwark of British conservatism, the reporters did not telegraph to their papers what the Prince of Wales had said. It was far too radical, far too disrespectful to time-honored British institutions.

"It would simply have raised hell!" I was told by one who had got the story at first hand.

There are two main reasons for that deep interest of the Prince of Wales in the working classes of the realm over which he will rule some day, which, to the minds of some of his subjects, savors so strongly of radicalism and, to a few of them, looks so startlingly like socialism. The first is the fact of his having associated during the World War with men in the humblest walks of life, all joined in the cause of fighting for England.

The second reason is the democratic nature of his contacts on the long journeys which he has been taking since the war to the British dominions and other lands, as Britain's "ambassador of good will." As was the case in the days when the prince roughed it in the trenches, these journeys—which, owing to their avowed object of fostering British trade relations, earned him the nickname of "Prince of Sales"—have brought him close to men of all classes and made it impossible for one of his sympathetic outlook to assume, on his return home, that devotion to the interests of a single class which some Britons think is the proper attitude for the heir to a throne.

The liberalism thus inculcated has been enormously increased by his frequent visits to the unfortunate dwellers in the slums of England, and by the first-hand knowledge thus derived of the wretchedness of their lives. Indeed, this liberal trend of mind, according to persons who know him well, has become the foundation of his whole character; so much so that it will find constant expression in his acts when he succeeds to the British throne.

"When he becomes king," I was told in London, "he will simply turn things upside down!"

One of the Boys

Some of the experiences of the prince in the war were of a sort well calculated to breed "radicalism" in his impressionable nature. Once, without permission of the aides who, to his great disgust, followed him wherever he went, he borrowed a bicycle and set out alone on a little unofficial trip to the front lines, just to see what war was really like. On his return to headquarters he lost his way and was discovered hours later by a distracted aide, hidden away in a shell-hole uncomfortably near the German trenches, where he was unconcernedly playing cards with a bunch of Tommies.

Another time, having observed how all the Tommies were forced to have their letters censored before being al-

lowed to send them home to wives or sweethearts, and seeing no good reason why his own correspondence should be treated differently, the prince shoved a letter which he had just written over the shoulder of an officer detailed to do the censoring for that day. Without looking around, the officer read a few lines of it and realized that it was from the Prince of Wales to King George V. Jumping from his seat, he faced the young man who had just handed him the letter and said respectfully:

"The correspondence of Your Royal Highness needs no censoring."

"Nonsense!" rejoined the prince. "Why shouldn't you censor what I write? Go ahead and read my letter to the end and see if there's anything wrong with it." And so much in earnest was he that the officer did as he had been asked and handed the letter back, with an official assurance duly stamped on its envelope that there was nothing within calculated to give aid and comfort to the Germans. I can vouch for the accuracy of this story because it was told to me by the officer who acted as the prince's censor.

Practicing What He Preaches

Incidentally, nothing illustrates better the independence of mind of the Prince of Wales and his stubbornness in the face of century-old prejudice as his refusal to get married. The spectacle of an heir to one of the world's proudest thrones unmarried in his fortieth year is well-nigh unprecedented; yet he continues obdurate against the incessant pressure exerted upon him by his father and the rest of the members of the British royal family, as well as by the whole weight of monarchical tradition.

The fact of the matter is that he has made up his mind to marry only as his fancy dictates. Yet, at the same time, he is not quite so radically inclined as to marry a "commoner"—such a step would be too great a blow not only for his royal relatives but for the great mass of monarchically minded British—so he prefers remaining single to tying himself to some princess for reasons of state and nothing else.

And hereby hangs a tale.

The prince's sister, Princess Mary, was married some years ago to Viscount Lascelles, a man without royal blood in his veins. The viscount takes his position as her consort very seriously indeed—to the considerable amusement of his brother-in-law, the Prince of Wales. Not long ago, when the prince has been going about in an especially care-free manner, associating with all sorts of persons and making speeches of an alarmingly socialistic trend, an aged and very conservative peer was deputed by the royal family to remonstrate with him and remind him that there was a limit to what the future King of England could properly do in the way of hail-fellow-well-met fraternizing.

So the old peer tackled the prince. The prince warmly defended his conduct. The discussion grew violent. Finally the nobleman, angered by the prince's obstinacy, told him straight from the shoulder:

"Your Royal Highness, you are growing every day commoner and commoner!"

The prince, instead of flying into a rage, burst out laughing, and, when he had recovered himself, said to the old peer:

"Well, if I am growing commoner

and commoner, remember that my brother-in-law, Lascelles, is growing every day royaler and royaler!"

As proof that his interest in bettering slum conditions has nothing perfunctory about it, the Prince of Wales is rapidly qualifying as an ideal landlord, thus forestalling critics only too eager to accuse him of not practicing what he preaches. In London he owns whole blocks of low-priced flats which he is turning into models of their kind. To these he pays frequent visits; and, to see that they are kept up to the mark by those in charge, he is constantly asking questions of the tenants and listening to their grievances. While I was in London recently he inaugurated two blocks of these model tenements, in the Kennington section, which are part of his London holdings. Although fitted with the most up-to-date improvements, these flats, which are of three and four rooms each, are rented, respectively, at the very low rate of 15 shillings and one pound a week—about \$3.65 and \$4.85, at the normal rate of exchange.

Practical Popularity

Some portion of the interest shown by the Prince of Wales in the poorer classes of his realm and a certain percentage of his radical tendencies are undoubtedly a matter of dynastic expediency. No royal family in the world has sensed so promptly and thoroughly the trend of the times as the royal family of Britain. King George V has endeared himself to his subjects—especially since the war—by his wholehearted devotion to what he considers to be his duty toward them.

In him there is scarcely a trace of the aloofness and belief in the "divine right of kings" usually associated with monarchs. His ideal is service to his country. The same is true of his consort, Queen Mary; and their example has strongly influenced the conduct of their four sons, notably that of the Prince of Wales.

There is a good reason behind his constant visits to slums, his speech-making ("I hate making speeches!" he recently confided to some old schoolmates) and his strong interest in the welfare of the British lower classes. Though the British are the most loyal people in the world to the monarchical tradition, they have also been foremost in whittling down the powers of their kings—witness how they sent one of

There can be no doubt that, when he is called upon to ascend the throne, he will embark upon his reign with a popularity among his humbler subjects well-nigh unprecedented in history.

And yet—there are those among the extreme radicals of England who view this popularity with misgivings. They would prefer a haughtier heir to the throne; one who shunned contact with the lowlier element among his subjects; one who reminded the latter constantly of the enormous gulf between them and him. The prince's cheerful fraternizing with persons "beneath" him is by no means palatable to these extremists. Here is how they arrive at their attitude:

They are dead against the capitalistic system and will never be satisfied until it is swept from the earth. As they see it, the apex of the capitalistic system in England is the king. When it goes, he must go (yes, despite the loyalty to the throne, which is almost universal among the British, these extremists actually dare to visualize a future Britain without a monarch!). Now, if the Prince of Wales were a haughty scion of royalty, he would be unpopular by the time he ascended the throne, and would thus bring nearer the end of the British monarchy. But, in view of his enormous personal popularity, especially among the masses, he will undoubtedly be hailed with delight by the latter when he becomes king, and will, therefore, postpone the triumph of radicalism.

Such an attitude makes extremely delicate the position of those Britons—labor leaders and others—who seek a bridge between the upper and the lower classes. This is particularly true of that well-known laborite, J. H. Thomas, familiarly called Jim Thomas, who divides his time between piloting the masses toward a better lot and partaking of caviar and champagne with the lords and ladies of the British realm. Recently, the Prince of Wales, at one of the numerous banquets which he is compelled to attend, saw Thomas among the guests and, with a grin on his face, proceeded to tell those present that he had just received a letter from an anonymous correspondent which included the following angry fling: "If you persist in calling Jim Thomas your friend, you will make him even more swell-headed than he is now!"

"In spite of this warning," continued the prince, "I want to say that I am