

ENGLAND UNDER EDWARD VII

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England under Edward VII by J. A. Farrer

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA



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PREFACE

A PERIOD of eight centuries divides the reign of William the Conqueror from that of Edward VII, and in that space of time as many as thirty-four Sovereigns ruled, yet Sir William Harcourt once made bold to say that since the Conqueror the seventh Edward was the greatest of all. Whether by "greatest" he meant the greatest politically or morally, or from both points of view combined, Sir William did not explain, but in any case it is best to leave his judgment undisputed, and to let the chief events of the King's reign produce what impression they may on the minds of those who may care to remember them.

In our domestic politics the King constitutionally played little but an acquiescent part; his duty was mainly to assent to and sign such laws as were passed. Hence in the story of his reign the legislation of the period from 1901 to 1910 only calls for rather summary treatment. But in foreign politics the King availed himself to the full of the freedom of action which the Constitution still allows to a monarch, and it is in his action in this field that the interest of his reign mainly lies. And, though some have contended that at all times he was the mere servant of the foreign policy of his Foreign Ministers, first of Lord Lansdowne, and after 1905 of Sir Edward (Lord) Grey, the balance of the best contemporary evidence, both English and foreign, is to the effect that he was in the main his own Foreign Minister, initiating, commanding, and controlling all our policy towards other Powers.

It is this fact that lends its chief interest to the King's reign, and renders it one of the most important in our political history; and for this reason our relations with foreign

Powers must inevitably fill the foremost place in any picture of the first decade of this century. For it was then that our foreign policy took a decided swerve to the side of France, and that her secular rival, Germany, stepped into the place of our leading potential enemy. It is, indeed, scarcely too much to say that war, in spirit at least, raged between ourselves and Germany during the whole period. This is the chief historical fact of the reign, nor without much allusion to this aspect of it can the causes ever be rightly understood of that ultimate war of 1914 which was to prove to the world a disaster of such illimitable magnitude and of such measureless consequence.

The chief question of the King's reign is, how far the mental international atmosphere produced by it was conducive to the maintenance of peace or the reverse; and, since such atmosphere is mainly the product of the speeches of leading statesmen and of influential organs of the Press, it is in these above all that the causes of subsequent events must be traced. For this purpose German no less than English authorities have been consulted, in the hope that in this way the point of view of both England and Germany may be presented with the utmost possible fairness and impartiality. History is only of value in so far as it is able to rise above the bias of nationality and to deal with the world's affairs from the same standpoint of indifference that might be expected of an observer from another planet.

The following list comprises the German authorities which it has been found necessary and useful to consult :—

1. Professor Schiemann's *Deutschland und die grosse Politik*: a republication of his weekly articles on foreign affairs in the *Kreuzzeitung* from the year 1901. As giving the feeling of the moment from week to week, this work was justly described in the *Quarterly Review* (July 1908, p. 283) as "more authoritative and influential than any other regular feature of German journalism." In answer to the rebuke of the Reviewer that he was habitually anti-English, the Professor disclaimed all hostility to England :

what he desired was an Anglo-German alliance for the strengthening of the world-position of both countries. It was not England that he attacked, but only the systematic Press campaign against Germany which he thought had lasted from the time of the Venezuelan conflict in 1903. The poisoning of English opinion by papers like *The Times*, the *National Review*, and the *Standard* had made the alliance he desired among the most improbable contingencies of the future (viii. 317).

✓ 2. Prince Bülow's *Reden* or Speeches, in three volumes, from 1897 to 1909. As the years of the Chancellor's office were almost concurrent with King Edward's reign, these speeches are of special importance; their general excellence being so far recognized that Sir Charles Dilke spoke of one of them made in November 1906 as "one of the best ever made by any statesman."

✓ 3. Prince Bülow's *Deutsche Politik*. This book was published in 1916, in the middle of the war, and gives the German view of the causes which produced it.

4. Count Reventlow's *Deutschland Auswärtige Politik*. This work is rather marred by a general avoidance of all reference to the authorities for the Count's statements. Its tone is far less moderate than that of Prince Bülow, and represents the more decided mistrust of this country that was felt by certain sections of the German people.

5. Otto Hammann's *Zur Vorgeschichte des Weltkrieges*: a German history of international politics from 1897 onwards. The writer's official position gave him much insight into the workings of the diplomacy of the period.

6. Baron von Siebert's *Diplomatische Aktenstücke zur Geschichte der Entente-politik der Vorkriegsjahre*. As the editor was formerly Secretary of the Russian Embassy in London, his collection of the diplomatic correspondence between the Russian Foreign Ministers and the Russian Ambassadors abroad between 1909 and 1912 is of the greatest historical interest and importance.

7. Baron von Eckhardstein's *Ten Years in the Court of St. James'*. The Baron was Chargé d'Affaires in London

whilst Count Hatzfeldt was the German Ambassador, and the intimacy he had with the King, with Lord Lansdowne, and Mr. Chamberlain gives special interest to his testimony regarding the politics of the closing nineteenth century and the opening twentieth.

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