

# THE BLUNDERS OF EDWARD VII. AND HOW TO REPAIR THEM

By *Aleister Crowley.*

LITERARY criticism at its best is an uncertain art; when it is shallow it is a dangerous snare.

Many and pompous have been the critics who have insisted on the dissimilarity between the Diary of Marie Bashkirtseff and the "Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands." Max Beerbohm, truly enough, refers to the latter as "that masterpiece of poignant introspection and self-analysis," but I sometimes feel as if Max Beerbohm, like his own Matthew Arnold, were not always wholly serious.

If I am right, it is another case of the true word spoken in jest, for the Russian artist and the English Empress had at least one more important quality in common. Each, like Kipling's gorilla, had too much ego in her cosmos. Neither could conceive the world as anything but a toy made to please her.

Each regards opposition as an incomprehensible obstacle, and develops a Manichaean theory to account for a spot on her pinafore. Queen Victoria humbling herself before her Maker, and resigning herself to the will of God, falls not far short of saying: "Father, I forgive You, for You know not what You do!"

She treated the Prince Consort as a child treats a doll, and when the Prince of Wales began to grow up and have a soul of his own, she felt aggrieved.

The result was naturally an estrangement. Edward on his side began to wonder whether the old woman was immortal. She kept his pocket-money down, and drove him to the money-lenders.

Worse than that, she drove him to recognize wealthy persons who were socially impossible. This matter came to a head. The Daily Telegraph, at that period a paper of some standing in England, published a historic leader.

Did the Prince of Wales cheat at cards, or did he not? was asked openly. If the suspicion were not laid to rest once and for all, royalty could not survive in England. So said the chief royalist organ.

The blow to the old Queen was terrible. Her whole domestic policy had been to aggrandize the throne. She had played on English chivalry with masterly skill; she had doubled the number of peers during her reign so as to broaden the base on which she rested. (The fallacy appeared later; she had merely cheapened the peerage.)

In this crisis, then, the only possible course was taken. A scapegoat was selected in the person of Sir William Gordon-Cumming, who gallantly sacrificed himself to the honor of the heir-apparent. The characteristic farce of English jurisprudence was played to crowded houses. The Prince was whitewashed, and the dynasty saved.

But, as Solomon sagely saw, you cannot bleach a Hottentot, and the chloride of lime employed is itself apt to be malodorous. The intelligent classes in England were not fooled for a moment. Fortunately, they were as politically negligible then as they are now. So we heard, and heeded not, the constant scandals connected with the Prince's visits to Paris; the peculiar fashion of neckwear set by the Princess, and the tragic end of Lord Randolph Churchill, were matters of no importance.

In all this the Prince was hardly to be blamed. A Cato

might have absolved him. He felt himself competent, and was ambitious. Before him was a sorry line of forebears. Thackeray had branded the Georges to eternity. He wished to make his mark. And the old Queen played with him like Punch. No sooner did he pop his head up, than whack!

She was jealous, and, being a prude, quite out of sympathy with the broadening tendencies of the time, she was also afraid. So the thwarted and disgruntled Edward vacillated between Newmarket Health and the Café Anglais, honestly evasive of the scope of people like Roberts. Another factor, too, entered his mind. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; and the worst of it is, that sometimes hope deferred becomes hope disappointed. He might die before his mother; and, for another thing, there was a vague rumor even among the people—and more than a rumor in those exalted circles which take dynasties seriously—that the German Kaiser had some claim upon the Crown. I happened to be in St. Petersburg when a hint of this sort in an after-banquet speech of Wilhelm II. caused the British Ambassador to "leave the room in a marked manner," and I well remember the following nine days' storm in the diplomatic teacup.

After all, the British people had turned out their own King for a German Elector—that was why he was Prince of Wales. And he felt that, except on Epsom racecourse, he was not much more popular than James II. History might repeat itself. All his urbanity and tact were thrown away on the Nonconformist conscience. He did not yet realize that Nonconformity was moribund.

And all he could do was to wait. Once he was King, he would be popular enough, he thought. Rightly; in a year he was the most popular King since Charles II. The real people of England, the people that rarely vote, and never write to newspapers, love a broad-minded, jolly King. To be a good sport covers a multitude of sins.

So on that point he felt safe. The only danger was that Cousin Wilhelm might pop up before he was in the saddle. The natural consequence in his mind, a sound, clear mind, was a growing irritation during the years of waiting, whenever Germany became obtrusive. Little by little, the idea took shape; he was ambitious, and a Germanophobe. The resultant of these two forces was a determination to go down to history as the King who conquered Germany.

Once formulated, the purpose grew consciously. His wits, sharpened by the Jews who were his bosom friends, saw how to execute the project. (Here was another pinprick, by the way. He "insisted" in Austria on being accompanied to a hunting party by Baron Hirsch. They found themselves alone at the rendezvous. Such an insult would have drawn from a man far less proud than the Prince of Wales a secret oath of deadly vengeance.)

It may well have been, however, that all such plans were in the condition of a super-saturated solution of Glauber's salts. One touch of a needle, one focussing point, and suddenly all crystallizes. If so, such a determining factor was supplied by the incidents attending the Jameson Raid.

It is not certain that the Prince of Wales was privy to this affair. It is likely. At least it is doubtful whether the responsible Ministers of the Crown would have dared to