Gottlieb's orchestra played in the hall, and the barrel-organ, previously brought into use for dancing, was now usually silent. Lord Carrington thought it was just like the 'old days'. He wrote:

> I could hardly realize that the Prince of Wales was King. He seemed so entirely himself ... his own kind dear self. The Queen walked out alone after dinner, and the King remained in the dining-room and smoked as he used to do ... When the Queen retired we all went into the smoking-room, which was the same as ever. The Leech pictures, the same furniture, the table where the Equerry wrote the stable orders for the morning, the bowling alley next door, and the whole thing brought back memories of Blandford, Oliver Montagu, Christopher Sykes ... Charlie Beresford, Charlie Dunmore, and old Quin.

[14]

The King at Work

There is no use in ministers liking the King if he is treated like a puppet.

IMMEDIATELY on his accession, the King took up his new duties with obvious relish, conscious of the importance of his vocation and enjoying to the full its responsibilities. Lord Redesdale described how he once called at Marlborough House during the early months of the new reign before the King had moved to Buckingham Palace:

> I found him in his private sitting-room all alone, and we sat smoking and talking over old times for a couple of hours. Towards midnight he got up and said, 'Now I must bid you good night, for I must set to work,' pointing to a huge pile of familiar red boxes. 'Surely,' I said, 'your Majesty is not going to tackle all that work to-night!' His answer was, 'Yes, I must! Besides, it is all so interesting,' and then he gave me one of his happy smiles.

Lord Esher also described the enthusiasm with which the King came to his new work, how he would ask question after question, interrupt the answers with his quick, 'Yes ... yes ... yes', give orders, scribble notes on bits of paper in his scarcely legible handwriting, and then stand in front of the fire with one of his immense cigars between his teeth, 'looking wonderfully like Henry VIII, only better tempered'. The impression he gave Lord Esher was 'that of a man, who, after long years of pent-up action, had suddenly been freed from restraint and revelled in his liberty'. He insisted on having all his letters 'brought to him unopened, about 400 a day', and sorted them by himself. 'He tried at first to open them all but found that impossible.' He also insisted on signing the 6,600 army commissions which had accumulated during the last months of his mother's reign; and he then embarked on the Royal Navy commissions, which had formerly been signed at the Admiralty as traditionally being the responsibility of the Lord High Admiral, but he found that additional task beyond him.

He was too restless and impatient, however, for prolonged deskwork. Soon he took to summoning secretaries and giving them outlines of what he wanted to say rather than writing long letters himself as his mother had done. He was far more at home in fulfilling those public engagements which he was called upon to carry out in such numbers and which he performed so well. He gave the impression of being really interested in what he was doing and displayed an ability to listen to officials telling him things he knew already, or did not want to know at all,

with every sign of absorbed concentration. According to some observers, though, he was not at his best at levees. But then, those who attended levees did not care for them either. They could be tedious, and even on occasion embarrassing. An official was posted at the door leading into the throne room to turn away anyone who was incorrectly dressed. The absent-minded Arthur Hardinge, for instance, once appeared before the horrified King with a buttoned boot on one foot and an evening shoe on the other, a blunder he weakly excused on the grounds that he was very short-sighted. Edward Marsh, then a junior clerk in the Colonial Office, wrote of a levee in St James's Palace in 1902:

> The levee was a most wearisome performance and I don't know whether to laugh or cry when I think of the manner in which 1,500 of the educated classes spent their morning. It took about an hour to get round, through the successive pens in which one is shut up with the same little group of people ... and when one reached 'the Presence' one was rushed through with just time to make one's bow to the red, bored, stolid sovereign.

If bored at levees at St James's, the King rarely displayed any lack of interest at equally tedious functions elsewhere. Every year there were reports of his laying foundation stones, opening exhibitions, attending dinners, visiting hospitals and schools, inspecting new libraries and art galleries with the same assiduity he had displayed as Prince of Wales. And even those whose comments were not for publication spoke of his geniality and *bonhomie*. Osbert Sitwell, as a boy at Eton, was present when he opened the School Library, a memorial to boys killed in the Boer War, and was struck by the 'very individual and husky warmth' of his voice: 'There was, as he spoke in public, a geniality in its sound, as of one who found in life the utmost enjoyment, and in spite of a rather prominent and severely attentive blue eye, and a certain appearance of fatigue, the chief impression was one of good humour.'

Every summer, between Ascot Races and Cowes Regatta, he went to an industrial town, usually in the Midlands or the North, to undertake the duties of an official visit. And every winter he opened Parliament in state, resuming a ceremonial which Queen Victoria had abandoned, and renewing the practice of reading the speech from the throne.

He was an effective speaker. At the first Privy Council meeting of his reign he had, as John Morley said, impressed his audience by his ability to speak fluently and spontaneously without a prepared script. On that occasion, after almost breaking down on referring to the irreparable loss he and the whole nation had suffered by the death of his 'beloved mother, the Queen', he spoke with what Lord Carrington described as 'dignity and pathos' for eight minutes without reference to a single note. It was a facility which he perfected. He told Lord Fisher that he had once learned a speech off by heart to welcome the French President to England. But

when the time came to deliver it, he could not remember the words he had so laboriously memorized and was forced to 'keep on beginning at the beginning'. So, except when he had to say a few words in Danish or Russian, he had never tried to learn a speech again; and his delivery was all the better for it, whether in English, French or German. It was remembered with pleasure how, on a visit to Germany, he had been quite equal to the occasion when the Kaiser had risen to make an impressive speech at a dinner at which it had been agreed no speeches should be made. On completing his prepared oration, the Kaiser invited the King to reply. Undeterred, the King did so; and, apart from a moment's embarrassing silence when he tapped the table in an effort to recall a particular German word, which Prince von Bülow supplied for him, he made quite as effective a speech as his host had done. Very rarely did he make a mistake in one of these more or less impromptu speeches; and when, calling in at an Italian port during one of his Mediterranean cruises, he caused brief embarrassment in Rome and London by referring to a non-existent 'alliance' between England and Italy when he should have said 'friendship', it was admitted that the slip—which was not reported in the Press—was of a kind that the King scarcely ever made.

Admirably as he carried out his ceremonial and social duties, the King soon made it clear that he was not prepared to confine himself to making speeches, signing documents and laying foundation stones. He was not much concerned with domestic policies or with colonial affairs; he was bored to death by talk about free trade and tariff reform; but he evinced a deep interest in the army and the navy; in hospitals and medical research; and, above all, in foreign policy.

He told St John Brodrick, Secretary for War, that he expected to be consulted about the appointment and promotion of senior officers, about every important question of policy, and particularly about the reform of the army medical system which, so Brodrick said, 'he pressed forward from the first day of his reign'. He was equally insistent that matters of naval policy should be brought to his attention; and, when the time came, gave his unhesitating support to Lord Fisher, whose reforms, as Fisher himself recognized, might well have been scuppered by his opponents had not the King made it so forcibly obvious where his own sympathies lay in the First Sea Lord's bitter quarrel with the vain and tiresome Lord Charles Beresford.

As it was with the army and navy, so it was with medicine. Numerous hospitals had cause to be grateful for the attention he paid to their welfare. He helped to found the National Association for the Prevention of Consumption; he started King Edward's Hospital Fund which eventually had an annual income of over £150,000; and he assured one of his several medical friends, Sir Frederick Treves, that it was his 'greatest ambition not to quit this world until a real cure for cancer' had been found.

Concerned as he was with all these matters, however, he devoted only a fraction of the time to them that he gave to foreign affairs. Once a week he asked Charles Hardinge to have breakfast with him at Buckingham Palace, and he discussed foreign politics 'most of the time at these interviews with great breadth and interest'. He read through every dispatch that came from abroad, his secretary observed, 'often when the subject was very dull. Any inaccuracy annoyed him: even a slip of the pen put him out'. And he paid the same close attention to those private letters which he liked British ambassadors to write to him as supplements to their official dispatches. He studied draft treaties carefully, and occasionally made suggestions for alterations in their wording. He received foreign representatives alone in his room; and, when abroad, with the agreement of the Foreign Office, undertook diplomatic discussions both with other sovereigns and with their ministers.

His usefulness in this respect was widely recognized: as Disraeli had said of him, 'he really has seen everything and knows everybody'. So, too, was his conscientiousness appreciated. Charles Hardinge wrote:

> Often I had to suggest a visit which I knew would be irksome to him, or that he should see somebody that I knew he would not want to see, and he would exclaim, 'No, no, damned if I will do it!' But he always did it, however tiresome it might be for him, without my having to argue the point or in fact say another word. He had a very strong sense of the duties which his position entailed and he never shirked them.

Yet he was constantly given cause to complain that the government did not take him into their confidence, that he was consulted only when it suited their convenience, that he was often ignored, and that the excuses which ministers made to him when they failed to keep him informed of their actions were 'often as "gauche" as their omissions'. Uneasily aware that ministers had been far more punctilious in keeping the monarch informed of their problems and proposed solutions in Queen Victoria's time than they now were in his, he was deeply offended at what he took to be the least sign of slighting neglect. In the first few months of his reign he had reason to rebuke Lord Halsbury, the Lord Chancellor, for having, without reference to him, published a report about a new form of declaration against the doctrine of transubstantiation which, according to the Bill of Rights of 1689, the monarch was required to make before reading the speech from the throne. Since the King himself had suggested a modification in the wording of the declaration, which he took to be insulting to his Roman Catholic subjects, he was 'naturally much surprised that he had received no intimation, previous to his having read it in the newspapers, of the report, as it was an important matter concerning the Sovereign regarding which he ought to have been consulted'.

This was the first of numerous rebukes he felt obliged to administer. Throughout his reign he fought to maintain the Crown's right to be consulted, to prevent the Sovereign's becoming a 'mere signing machine', to retain those few remaining royal prerogatives which he felt were being gradually eroded. Yet he could not prevent their erosion. He was forced to accept not only Parliament's authority to cede territory, but also the Prime Minister's power to appoint and dismiss ministers without reference to the Sovereign, as well as the Cabinet's right to take over the patronage of so-called 'Crown' appointments, including the appointment of bishops which, in the last few years of his reign, was left in the hands of Campbell-Bannerman, born of Presbyterian parents in Glasgow, and Asquith, the son of a noncomformist Lancashire wool-spinner.

Although eventually he lost interest in the selection of bishops, he never did so in the case of diplomatic appointments. But his suggestions about these were quite as likely to be disregarded as they had been when he was Prince of Wales. In 1904, for example, his proposal that Arthur Herbert should go to Sweden and Sir Rennell Rodd to Morocco was followed by Rodd's being retained at Stockholm and Herbert's being despatched to Norway.

As though intent upon reminding his ministers of his concerned and watchful eye on their affairs, the King was as ready to offer his comments on the papers that were sent to him as he was to call attention to points which the ministers appeared to have overlooked or underestimated. One day complaining about the 'trash' which the Poet Laureate, Alfred Austin, sent to him, the next about papers being initialled instead of signed, or addressed to him in an incorrect manner, the King was determined not to be disregarded. Sometimes his interference was fruitful: after his insistence that a grant of £50,000 to Lord Roberts on being created an earl on his return from South Africa was disgracefully mean, the grant was doubled. And although his objection to the appointment of the American Admiral Mahan as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge—on the grounds that the chair ought to be held by an Englishman—did not result in the selection of the King's nominee, John Morley, it did bring about the appointment of a compromise candidate, the classical scholar John Bagnell Bury. Usually, however, the King's inconvenient views were, if possible, ignored in the hope that he would—as frequently he did—not continue to press them once they had been stated.

He never, however, ceased to press his right to be informed of government decisions before they were implemented. He appreciated that there might be some constitutional objection to his being allowed to see Cabinet papers while important matters were under discussion; and was evidently not surprised to learn that the Prime Minister considered it 'impossible ... to yield in a matter of this kind'. But he did insist that it

was his 'constitutional right to have all dispatches of any importance, especially those initiating or relating to a change of policy, laid before him prior to their being decided upon'. This right, 'always observed during Queen Victoria's reign', was certainly not always observed during his. In April 1906 he had reason to complain that the Prime Minister never brought anything before him, never consulted him in '*any* way'. The perfunctory reports of Cabinet meetings that were sent to him really made 'an absolute fool of the King,' Francis Knollys protested the following year. 'There is no use in ministers *liking* the King if he is treated like a puppet.'

Under the next administration the situation did not much improve. When, in July 1908, the King asked to see 'a copy of Winston Churchill's Army Scheme', the Secretary for War passed the letter on to the Prime Minister, who sent it back with the comment, 'I return this. I have replied to Knollys in the sense which you suggested. It is, in any case, an impertinent request. These people have no right to interfere in any way in our deliberations.'

Most of the King's disagreements with his ministers were attributable to his being 'completely left in the dark'. Since the ruin of Sir Charles Dilke by the scandal of his divorce, and of Lord Randolph Churchill by disease, the King had no close political friends other than the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Rosebery. He did not get on with his Conservative Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, with whom he had almost nothing in common. Nor did he relish the company of the three ministers, Lord Lansdowne, Lord Selborne and St John Brodrick, with whom, as Foreign Secretary, First Lord of the Admiralty and Secretary for War, he was principally concerned. Arnold-Forster, who succeeded Brodrick in 1903, was even worse, 'obstinate as a mule', according to Lord Esher, opposing everything which the King proposed. Nor were Balfour's opponents any better, in the King's opinion. Their leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, had given particular offence by his criticisms of the conduct of the Boer War, speaking of British 'methods of barbarism in South Africa', a phrase that so annoyed the King that he had with difficulty been dissuaded from sending for the Liberal leader and telling him to avoid such remarks in future. Since then Campbell-Bannerman's 'gratuitous and ungenerous' attacks on the Prime Minister had continued to exasperate the King, who remarked to Knollys that it was 'curious' that he hardly ever opened his mouth 'without saying something in bad taste'.

When Campbell-Bannerman succeeded Balfour in 1905 and the King got to know him better, he became quite fond of him. But he continued to annoy the King by his speeches on foreign policy, a subject about which—like Lloyd George—he knew 'nothing'. 'Between ourselves,' Knollys confided to Esher in 1907, 'I don't think the King ever will like "C.B." politically.' As for Campbell-Bannerman's Under-Secretary for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, the King decided that he was '*almost more* of [a] cad in office than he was in opposition' when he had 'showed a great want of taste' and talked 'simple nonsense'. He liked Churchill well enough as a man—though Francis Knollys did not—but Churchill's conduct towards Lord Milner was, in the King's opinion, 'simply scandalous', while his later comments on the 'richer classes' were 'unforgivable'.

There were, indeed, very few politicians whom the King fully trusted. He thought John Morley, Secretary for India, 'wonderfully agreeable and sensible'. He liked Arnold-Forster's successor, Haldane, who was 'always acceptable', though he described him as a 'damned radical lawyer and a German professor' when it fell to Haldane's lot to reduce the army estimates. He got on well, too, with the ebullient, working-class President of the Local Government Board, John Burns, whose appearance in knee-breeches, Esher said, was 'a revelation' and whose summary of his relationship with the King was expressed in the words, 'Me and 'im get on first-rate together.' The King was also particularly attached to Lord Fisher, a man of commanding personality, who wholeheartedly returned the King's affection and remained forever grateful for his support against his enemies. '*They would have eaten me but for Your Majesty*,' Fisher once told the King, who was delighted that his dear friend had triumphed over that 'gasbag' Beresford.

The King did not enjoy many victories himself. He did get his own way with the Order of Merit which he insisted, against all objections, should be open to military and naval officers despite the great number of other honours available to them. He was equally and successfully insistent that the Kaiser should be allowed to decorate all the British officers and men who had been in attendance on him while he was in England at the time of Queen Victoria's death, although his ministers much regretted the growing practice of British citizens accepting foreign decorations. The King also occasionally managed to wrest a written promise from a minister by declining to sign a paper until the required undertaking had been given. He refused, for example, to sign a Royal Warrant concerning army pay and allowances until Arnold-Forster had assured him in writing that no serving officer would have his pay cut, unless, at the same time, his duties were to be reduced. The King was again victorious when an attempt was made to limit the time an equerry could remain in his service to five years and to stop their army pay for that period. And when the government, which had agreed to pay the expenses he incurred in entertaining foreign sovereigns, asked that a distinction should be made between political and private visits, the King refused to allow that such a distinction could be made. He had his own views, Knollys told the Treasury, 'respecting the importance, from a political point of view, of visits of foreign sovereigns to this country which might

not coincide with those of the Secretary of State'; and there might, therefore, be 'constant conflicts between the King on one side, and the Treasury and Foreign Office on the other'. This argument proving ineffective, the King said that he would send for the Prime Minister and tell him personally that he would not stand for 'such an attempted evasion by the Treasury of what was agreed upon' at the time of his accession. And at this threat, the Treasury gave way.

It was usually, however, the King who had to give way; and he rarely did so without a struggle. Determined to outgrow his reputation for being over-impressionable, in his later years he was often obstinate. And even when he had been convinced that he must yield to pressure he would not do so immediately, saying, 'I will consider the matter,' which his staff learned to translate as, 'I recognize that I will shortly have to surrender.'

In the first year of his reign a young officer who had been cashiered for cowardice by surrendering to the enemy in South Africa appealed to him to exercise his royal prerogative of mercy. The King read the papers, decided that the officer had been harshly treated, and approached the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts. Roberts agreed with the King and asked the Adjutant-General to hold a special court of inquiry. The court recommended that the sentence should be quashed and that the officer should be convicted of an error of judgement and allowed to resign his commission. But the Secretary of State for War, who was concerned by the number of times officers had surrendered unnecessarily in the war and had considered it his unpleasant duty to make an example of this particular officer, threatened to resign if the harsher punishment were not imposed. The King's apparent willingness to pardon the young man anyway brought from the Prime Minister a warning of the possibility of the entire government's resignation in order to defend the principle of collective Cabinet responsibility. So the officer had to be sacrificed; and the King had to yield to the government's pressure.

The King also had to yield when the war was over and it was proposed to appoint a Royal Commission to enquire into its conduct. He wrote to the Prime Minister:

> This system of 'washing our dirty linen in public' the late Queen had a horror of. The Government is a strong one with a large Parliamentary majority. Why, therefore, should Ministers pledge themselves, or give way to demands from unimportant M.P.'s? The proposed Inquiry will do the Army and also the Country harm in the eyes of the civilised world.

The Prime Minister replied that he was already pledged to the Commission and that he could not overrule the Cabinet; and the King was left to complain gloomily to Knollys about the apparent power of a body which neither the King nor the Prime Minister could gainsay.

The King was no more successful when he attempted to prevent the publication of an *Army Journal* in which officers were to be free to express their feelings on military subjects. This, the King maintained, was totally opposed to the army's tradition of silence. He would 'neither sanction nor support' the *Journal* in any way; 'this should be clearly understood'; he washed his hands 'of the whole matter'. But the *Journal* was established all the same.

Nor did the King's views prevail when he suggested that the age for admittance of subalterns into the Guards might be reduced to eighteen; nor when he proposed that on the fiftieth anniversary of the Indian Mutiny the occasion should be marked 'by a judicious distribution of honours'; nor when he tried to obtain an earldom for Lord Curzon; nor when he asked that the band of the Coldstream Guards should be sent to play in Germany, a request turned down by the Foreign Office, whose 'extraordinary conduct' of the 'whole transaction' caused him 'much annoyance'. Nor did the King succeed in preventing the admission of native members to the Viceroy of India's Council, which he considered a 'step fraught with the greatest danger to the maintenance of the Indian Empire under British rule'. When Satyendra Prassano Sinha, a distinguished Hindu lawyer, was suggested as a suitable member of the Council, the King wrote to protest 'most strongly'. He told Lord Minto, the Viceroy:

> To take a very clever native on to your Executive Council must necessarily be a source of much danger to our rule in the Indian Empire. I am afraid it is the 'thin end of the wedge', and it will require a most resolute Viceroy to avoid being forced to nominate one if not two native members of the council. I can hardly believe that the present appointment of a Hindoo will not create great and just indignation among the Mahomedans and that the latter will not be contented unless they receive an assurance that one of their creed succeeds to Mr Sinha.

A week later, however, he was obliged to sign 'the objectionable paper'. 'Do try and induce Morley not to be so obstinate by appointing another Native,' he asked Esher on Sinha's resignation. 'He knows how strong my views are on the subject, and so does Minto; but they don't care what I say, nor does any member of my precious (!) Govt.'

One of the most painful of all the King's disagreements with his government was over his determination, during Balfour's premiership, not to confer a Knighthood of the Garter upon the Shah of Persia, who had been persuaded by the British Minister in Teheran that if he made the journey to England, which he was reluctant to do, the King would admit him into that most noble order of chivalry. The King contended that it was a Christian order and could not, therefore, be bestowed upon an infidel even though his mother had conferred it upon the Shah's

father as well as upon two Sultans of Turkey. The government, on the other hand, maintained that were the Shah not to receive the Garter which he had been led to expect would be bestowed upon him, he was quite likely out of pique to ally himself with Russia, a consequence as much to be dreaded as it was easy to avoid. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, endeavoured to solve the problem by preparing a memorandum of a proposed revision in the statutes of the Order to enable it to be conferred upon non-Christians. This document, so Lansdowne said, the King had read in his presence and, having done so, had nodded twice as if he approved of it. But this the King denied, though he admitted that he had taken the document from Lansdowne and had put it to one side intending to read it later. Anyway, Lansdowne went ahead with his plan and ordered from the court jewellers special Garter insignia from which the Christian emblems were to be removed. At the same time he sent a letter to the King explaining what he had done, and attached to it coloured illustrations of the proposed new Garter Star from which the Cross of St George was to be omitted.

The King at the time was on board the royal yacht, the *Victoria and Albert*, at Portsmouth; and Frederick Ponsonby described the dreadful scene when the King opened the harmless-looking Foreign Office box and took out the contents. He was already annoyed with the Shah, who, put out by the delay in conferring the Order upon him, had rejected a gold-framed miniature of the King surrounded by diamonds which had been offered him and had told his suite not to accept the English decorations which it had been proposed to confer upon them. Consequently, as the King picked up Lansdowne's letter and—in its recipient's eyes—its scarcely less than blasphemous enclosure, there was an immediate 'explosion. He was so angry that he flung the design across his cabin'. It went through the porthole and, so Ponsonby thought, into the sea. Furiously, the King dictated 'some very violent remarks' to be addressed to Lord Lansdowne. Ponsonby softened the tone of the letter; but, even so, Lansdowne recognized that he would have to resign unless the King gave way. While Knollys urged the King to stand firm, the Duke of Devonshire advised the Prime Minister to support Lansdowne, and the Shah became thoroughly disgruntled.

'We have a very difficult game to play,' Balfour wrote to the King, who continued to protest that it was 'an unheard of proceeding, one sovereign being dictated to by another as to what order he should confer on him'. Balfour persisted:

> Russia has most of the cards, yet it would be dangerous to lose the rubber. Our well-known fidelity to our engagements is one of our few trumps. We must not waste it ... Lord Lansdowne, erroneously believing himself to be authorized by Your Majesty, has pledged your Majesty to bestow the Garter upon the Shah—has indeed pledged your Majesty repeatedly and explicitly. If he be prevented from carrying out these pledges, what will be his position? ... And, if he resigned, could the matter stop there in these days of governmental solidarity?

Faced once again with the threat of the government's resignation, the King felt obliged to give way. He was 'much depressed about it all', Knollys told Balfour; but his 'high sense of duty' and 'patriotic motives' overcame his great reluctance. He insisted, however, that no decorations should be given to the Shah's suite in view of their earlier refusal of them, and that this must be the last time the Garter was conferred upon a person who was not a Christian. But even these conditions were not observed. The King was persuaded in the end to give decorations to the Shah's grumpy entourage, and though he would not agree to the Order being conferred upon the King of Siam five years later, he agreed to bestow it upon the more important Emperor of Japan.

If King Edward often found his successive governments tiresome and difficult, he was not an easy man to do business with himself. By the end of 1905 he had virtually stopped giving formal audiences to his ministers, preferring to talk to them when he happened to meet them at dinner parties or upon other social occasions, or dealing with them through people he knew well and trusted including Sir Charles Hardinge, Sir Ernest Cassel, Lord Fisher, de Soveral, Knollys and Esher, the last five of whom all worked closely together and met frequently at Brooks's Club.

Most of his personal staff were devoted to him; some loved him; but none could pretend that working for him was always a pleasure. When a subject interested him he was scrupulous, even pedantic in his attention to its smallest and most insignificant detail. 'He is ... a good listener, if you aren't too long,' Asquith, Campbell-Bannerman's successor, told his wife. 'He has an excellent head and is most observant about people ... He is not at all argumentative and understands everything that is properly put to him.' Yet with matters that bored him he would not make the slightest effort to comprehend them. Frederick Ponsonby commented:

> He had a most curious brain, and at one time one would find him a big, strong, far-seeing man, grasping the situation at a glance and taking a broad-minded view of it: at another one would be almost surprised at the smallness of his mind. He would be almost childish in his views, and would obstinately refuse to understand the question at issue.

He never troubled to conceal his annoyance at even the most trifling grievances. Ponsonby recalled accompanying him to the Anglican church at Biarritz, where they sat in the front pew. When the time for the collection came, Ponsonby discovered that the only coin he had in his pocket was a gold louis; so he put it in the plate next to the King's

donation, also a gold louis. After the service the King crossly asked Ponsonby if he always gave a louis. 'I hastily explained that I had nothing else,' Ponsonby commented, 'but he seemed to think I had spoilt his donation. He considered it only right to put in a gold piece, but when *I* did the same people thought nothing of his generosity.'

He was often 'distinctly peppery in his temper', speaking so sharply to those who asked him what he considered trivial questions that they dared not approach him a second time, sending the servants 'flying about in all directions'. Once the very able English Consul at Marseilles came aboard the royal yacht to deliver telegrams and letters from a large portfolio which, on being opened, proved to be empty. The King shouted at the man so loudly that he fled from the yacht terrified and, during the hour that it took the Consul to retrieve the missing correspondence, he marched up and down the deck, abusing him as a half-wit. When some order of his had not been fully understood, the King would repeat it very slowly and precisely, word by carefully enunciated word, while the listener stood before him, dreading the possibility that the bottled-up anger might suddenly burst forth before he was allowed to escape from the room.

If more seriously provoked, the King's rages were ungovernable. Ponsonby recalled numerous occasions of his master's 'boiling with rage', 'breaking into a storm of abuse', 'shouting and storming', 'shaking the roof of Buckingham Palace', 'becoming more and more angry and finally exploding with fury'. There was the time when Ponsonby advised him not to give several Victorian Orders on going to Portsmouth as this would lead naval officers to expect decorations whenever he went to any other naval base. Ponsonby said:

> He was furious and shouted at me that I knew nothing about such matters, and that, being a soldier, I was, of course, jealous of the navy. I, however, stuck to it, and said that the Victorian Order would be laughed at if it were given on such occasions. He was still more angry and crushed me with the remark that he didn't know that the Victorian Order was mine to give. After this explosion I at once retired, but I was interested to see that when he did visit Portsmouth he gave no decorations.

A similar explosion erupted on board the royal yacht when the King and Queen were cruising in the Mediterranean in May 1909 and it was decided to pay a visit to Malta. The King was looking through the programme arranged for his reception at Valetta when a telegram arrived from the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean to the effect that all ships in the area had been ordered off to make a demonstration. King Edward was 'perfectly furious and in his rage became most unreasonable'. Captain Colin Keppel, commander of the royal yacht, could do nothing with him and suggested that Frederick Ponsonby be sent for. Ponsonby recorded:

> When I entered the King's cabin I at once grasped that there was thunder in the air. 'What do you think of that?' the King shouted at me as he tossed me a telegram, and before I had time to answer he stormed away at the disgraceful way he was treated. He ended a very violent peroration by saying he had a good mind to order the Fleet back to Malta.

Ponsonby succeeded in calming the King's anger by pointing out that the navy, no doubt, had very good reasons for requiring the Mediterranean Fleet to make a demonstration; but when he went on to say that it was extraordinary that neither the Prime Minister nor the First Lord of the Admiralty had had the courtesy to keep him informed of the situation, the King's fury burst out afresh, and 'after breaking into a storm of abuse of the government', he instructed Ponsonby to send messages in cipher to both ministers which, 'had they been sent as he directed them, would certainly have startled both recipients and would probably have entailed their resignation'.

The King was equally angry when, on arriving in Naples, he found that the Queen had ordered donkeys to transport the royal party up to the summit of Vesuvius from the end of the railway. He refused to risk placing his great weight on the back of a small donkey; and, while the Queen and others of the party set off, he went for a short walk. According to her sister, the Empress Marie of Russia, who had been invited to join the party, the Queen did not trust herself to a donkey either but was carried up in a chair while the Empress walked. But Frederick Ponsonby remembered them all as having been on donkeys which were still a long way from the summit when the King returned from his walk to the train. Eager to begin a picnic luncheon, he had the train's whistle sounded at regular and increasingly frequent intervals to summon the riders back for the return journey. By the time the last rider had returned on his weary donkey, the King was 'boiling with rage' and 'unable to let off steam' on Queen Alexandra or on Fehr, the courier, who had wisely disappeared, the King poured 'the vials of his wrath' on Ponsonby's innocent head.

The King was also very demanding. Ponsonby recalled a day at Malta when, summoned to the King's cabin after breakfast, he was told to prepare a list of names for decorations and given fifteen letters to write as well as two to copy. On being released, Ponsonby rushed off to a review. Then he had to go to a luncheon in an army mess. After that there was a levee to attend, and he did not get back on board the royal yacht until half past five. Ponsonby recorded:

> The King sent for copies of letters to show the Queen at tea. Answer, not yet done. Afterwards he sent for me to discuss decorations and asked for a *typed* list. Answer, not done. Had I written yet to so-and-so; answer, no. Then the King said, 'My dear man, you must try and get something done.' So I got a list of decorations typed by a petty officer on board. He spelt two names wrong and left out a third, all of which the King found out ...

Although I sat up till 1.30 to get straight, the King is left with the impression that nothing is done.

With his work the King neither received nor asked for any help from the Queen. Occasionally the Queen's hatred of Germany or concern for her Danish relations would induce her to make some suggestion or protest. In 1890, for instance, during the government's negotiations to secure a protectorate over Zanzibar in exchange for Heligoland, she strongly protested about this 'knuckle-down to Germany' and prepared a memorandum in which she stressed that, before Britain came into possession of Heligoland during the Napoleonic Wars, the island had 'belonged from time immemorial' to Denmark and that 'in the hands of Germany it would be made the basis of operations against England'. The Queen also offered her services in translating letters from her brother, the King of Greece, and in making his difficulties well known to her husband and the government. But these were rare interpositions. As Charles Dilke said, the Queen never talked politics; and the King would not have had it otherwise.

He was even unwilling to let the Queen play an important part in the ceremonial duties of the monarchy or to attend official functions without him, insisting that such work was his responsibility and that she ought not to carry it out without his being there as well. Sometimes she complained, but she did not press the point. And while her husband spent more and more time away from her, she was quite content to retreat to Sandringham. She seemed perfectly happy on her own there; and when her husband did join her, she made it clear that whatever freedom or authority he might enjoy outside the home she was the mistress inside it. Lord Esher remembered how when he and the King, then Prince of Wales, had been discussing some important topic, a message had come from his wife asking him to go to her. He had not gone immediately; but a second summons had sent him scurrying from the room, leaving the business unfinished. And the Countess of Airlie recorded the Princess's cheerfully irreverent comment to Sir Sidney Greville, who, anxious not to keep his Royal Highness waiting any longer for an important engagement, pressed her to join him: 'Keep him waiting. It will do him good!'

The contents of official boxes which were never shown to the Queen were, however, readily made available to his son and his daughter-in-law. This was, the King explained, a 'very different matter'.

Prince George and his father were—and were always to remain—on excellent terms. 'We are more like brothers than father and son,' the King once wrote, a sentiment which his son later echoed in a letter to Lord Dalkeith; and although Prince George held his father in too much awe for this to be really so, there was between them an intimacy which

in royal relationships was so rare as to be almost unique. Recognizing his son's diffidence, his need of reassurance and sympathy, the King gave him the confidence that he would otherwise have lacked by a constant affirmation of love and trust, by an obvious pride in his reliability. He made it clear that he trusted him in a way that he himself had never been trusted and that he regarded him with an unreserved affection with which his own parents had never been able to look upon him.

He hated to be parted from him. Within a week of Queen Victoria's death he abruptly cancelled a long-standing arrangement for his son to make an official visit to Australia on the grounds that neither he nor Queen Alexandra could spare him so soon for so long. The King was persuaded to change his mind by the Prime Minister, but he parted from his son with sorrow, confessing to Lord Carrington that he 'quite broke down as he said good-bye', and he welcomed him home with unconcealed joy. Lord Esher recalled how the father, on the many occasions on which he spoke of his son, '*always*' did so 'with that peculiar look which he had—half smile, and half pathos—and that softening of the voice, when he spoke of those he loved. He used to say the words "my son" in quite a different tone from any which were familiar to me in the many tones of his voice.' For his part the Duke of York, as Prince George became in 1892, was utterly devoted to his father, consulting him about every aspect of his life, 'even as to whether his footmen ought to wear black or red liveries at dinner', and 'complaining terribly' when his father was not available for consultation that he had 'no one to go to or advise him'. After the King's death he could scarcely bring himself to speak of him without tears starting to his eyes. Though he recognized his faults, he admired him intensely and would never allow a word of criticism of him ever to be spoken. The only criticism he himself ever made of him in his voluminous correspondence with his mother was of a decision he had made to convert the bowling alley at Sandringham into a library.

It was the greatest comfort to the King in the last years of his life that his son and his son's family lived in a small house in the grounds of Sandringham—York Cottage, formerly known as the Bachelor's Cottage, which had been built as an annexe for male guests at Sandringham and which he had given to Prince George as a wedding present. Although this was not altogether pleasing to the Duchess of York—who was much more aware than her husband of the house's inconvenience and lack of character and who had to submit to perpetual visits from her mother-in-law—the King delighted in the intimate propinquity, and seemed never more content than when his grandchildren with their parents came up to the big house for tea.

The grandchildren loved to do so, and in later life they remembered their grandfather with unclouded pleasure and affection. They retained memories of being taken to see him in his robes before he left for

Westminster Abbey on the day of his coronation. 'Good morning, children,' he had said to them. 'Am I not a funny-looking old man?' They were too overwhelmed by the sight of him in his strange costume to offer any opinion in reply on that occasion, but they were not usually in the least in awe of him. His eldest grandson, Prince David—later King Edward VIII—recalling the contrast between life at York Cottage and that other world, redolent of cigar smoke and scent, which his grandfather inhabited, described him as being 'bathed in perpetual sunlight'. Prince David was so little afraid of him, in fact, that he was even capable, on one occasion at least, of interrupting his conversation at table. He was reprimanded, of course, and sat in silence until given permission to speak. 'It's too late now, grandpapa,' Prince David said unconcernedly. 'It was a caterpillar on your lettuce but you've eaten it.'

Both the King and Queen delighted in looking after their grandchildren when their parents were away. They encouraged them to romp about the house, even in the dining-room, and to show off to the guests, who were required to pretend they were elephants and to give the children rides on their backs. And, so as to enjoy them all the more, the King once contrived to leave their governess in London for a fortnight while he spoiled them to his heart's content at Sandringham.

With the small children of close friends he was equally indulgent, allowing Mrs Keppel's to call him 'Kingy'. The younger of the Keppel daughters, Sonia, was rather frightened of him at first. Instructed to curtsy to him whenever she saw him but never daring to 'look higher than beard-level', she 'played safe and curtsied to the cigar and rings'. But Sir Ernest Cassel, too, had a beard, wore rings and smoked cigars; 'so, more often than not, he came in for the curtsy'.

In time, though, Sonia overcame her nervousness, and when the King came to tea with her mother she was delighted to be allowed down into the drawing-room at six o'clock to see him. Together they devised a 'fascinating game' with bits of bread and butter which were sent, butter side downwards, racing along the stripes of his trousers. Bets of a penny each were placed on the contestants, Sonia's penny being provided by her mother. 'The excitement was intense while the contest was on ... and Kingy's enthusiasm seemed delightfully unaffected by the quality of his bets.'

On Princess Victoria's birthday a children's party was given each year by the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace where balloons were shot up into the sky and, on bursting, discharged presents all over the lawn while excited children raced about to pick them up. They were not in the least intimidated by the presence of their host, as most of their parents were; and when he asked one boy what he would like, he received the brusque command, 'More jam, King.'

[15]

The King at Home

The pleasure of giving seemed never to leave their Majesties, as it so often does with rich people.

PERPETUALLY alarmed by the prospect of boredom, the King was as anxious as ever to ensure that each day held for him the promise of some interesting activity. To make this easier to achieve, his yearly programme followed an almost unchangeable plan, largely regulated by the need to be in London in January or February for the State Opening of Parliament; by the social obligations of the London season, which began after Easter and ended with the races at Ascot in late June; and by those other race-meetings at which his Majesty's presence was expected as a matter of course. After the yachting at Cowes in early August he liked to be at Bolton Abbey, the Duke of Devonshire's Yorkshire house, for the opening of the grouse-shooting season on the twelfth. October would normally find him shooting at Balmoral. On 9 November he would invariably be at Sandringham for his birthday.

Although guests at Sandringham were pleased to find that life there was fairly informal, the King's taste for regularity and punctuality imposed upon it an almost immutable routine. Breakfast began at nine and ended promptly at ten. The Royal Family did not appear, having breakfast in their own rooms; but those who chose to come down for it would find small round tables laid in the dining-room and a menu as ample and varied as that demanded by the King's own voracious appetite. Indeed, the quantities of food consumed by the King, at breakfast as at every other meal, astonished those who, unapprised of his capacity, observed for the first time his zestful gourmandism.

After drinking a glass of milk in bed, he would often content himself with coffee and toast when he was to spend the morning indoors; but to fortify himself for a morning's shooting he could devour platefuls of bacon and eggs, haddock and chicken, and toast and butter, in as short a time as it would take a less hungry man to drink two cups of coffee. Soon afterwards, an hour or so in the cold fresh air would sharpen his appetite for hot turtle soup. Yet this would in no way impair his appetite for luncheon at half past two, just as a hearty luncheon would not prevent his appearing for tea in a short black jacket and black tie in the hall where, as his band played appropriate melodies, he helped himself to poached eggs, *petits fours* and preserved ginger as well as rolls and