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The Evangelical Quarterly

APRIL 15TH, 1936

THE LATE KING GEORGE V

A TRIBUTE¹

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever (1 Peter i. 24, 25).

THIS is a simple and solemn reminder to us all that the place that knows us now, shall some day know us no more. While nothing that we may do can change the immutable decree that has fixed the sure departure from this visible and wonderful world for all, high and low, rich and poor, there is, in this gracious ministry of God, the equally changeless promise that the Word of the Lord shall endure for ever. This is the Word which brings to light our immortality and the life that is life indeed. From that word still flow to us the overtures of God's mercy and love, pleading with us to accept their gift of a life that shall abide after the grass has withered and the flower of man's glory has fallen away. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." To this Word of God the wise ever resort for instruction and comfort. Even the foolish turn to it for redress when overwhelmed by a sorrow which nothing in their familiar cisterns can ease; and it never repels them.

On this day of national sorrow the intense reality of the teaching of our text is forced upon us by visible proof

¹ An address delivered by Rev. Prof. D. Maclean, D.D., on Tuesday, January 28th, 1936, at a Memorial Service in the Free Church Presbytery Hall, Edinburgh.

of the inescapable divine appointment in the sad occasion of our meeting. This morning we humbly and respectfully add our own tiny rivulet to the deep and wide river of mourning that flows from the home of royalty to the widow's lonely hut at the mill-pond.

One may search in vain through the long history of these realms for an exact parallel to the profound and universal grief stirred by the death of King George V. In that same history it is recorded how suffering England once hailed the demise of a sovereign with a joyful ringing of bells. To-day the population of realms immensely more extensive than former England feel, in the death of King George, the chill of a personal loss expressed in the suppressed sob of natural emotion. Why this infinitely diverse effect on the feelings of the subjects of the occupants of the same throne? The reason does not lie in the principle of monarchy, but in the abuse and use of sovereignty. The gracious monarch who is being borne to-day to his last resting place on a surge of sorrow of unprecedented depth and intensity seems to me to have won for himself and his throne this tribute of universal respect and affection because :

I. *He took sovereignty in trust from God.* The exercise of divine sovereignty in this world is the belief of all Christians. Its mysterious working may be hidden from us ; but its consequences in manifold ways are too apparent to be challenged. Our late gracious sovereign was a constant reader of the Word of God. There he must have found the source of the strength that enabled him to discharge with dignity, simplicity and success the almost unbearable responsibilities of his exalted and solitary position. Searching for the will of God he sought to carry it out, as he understood it, in a just and good rule, conscious of the greatness of his office and of the inability of any mortal man to bear it perfectly. His high sense of duty, which distinguished him to his last heroic effort against the fast receding tide of life,

was a reflection of his lofty view of his divinely-given trust. It is because of this fact that kingship, while in eclipse elsewhere, is bequeathed by the late sovereign to his successor beyond not merely the breath of challenge but even the breath of criticism.

II. *He wielded his sceptre with paternal interest.* Sovereignty and Fatherhood are inseparably connected in Scripture. Ideal monarchy should reflect these attributes in perfect harmony. Sovereignty without paternal interest often became a tyranny. Paternal indulgence without the restraint of sovereignty may be abused by subjects so grossly as to make this abuse a cause of anarchy. Never indeed in the experience of the subjects of these wide realms had these two great attributes been so uniquely blended as during the reign of our late King. From the exalted throne was heard the voice of a constitutional monarch who was at the same time of like substance with ourselves, and who shared to the full in his subjects' joys and sorrows. This inestimable contribution of King George V to the establishing of his throne in the affections of his subjects is a blessing which future generations shall enjoy.

III. *His sovereignty was strictly impartial.* All classes of the community stood before his throne on a level of equality as to claims for just and righteous rule. He was to a marked degree the King of the people. Kingship in him was the embodiment of the people. It showed itself in his part in public affairs. The officialism which is inevitable in regulated society stood as no barrier to an impartial display of kingly sympathy and interest. We had the honour done to the Free Church General Assembly by the visit of a Royal Prince who conveyed to the Assembly royal good wishes, which illustrates the point of my observation.

God gave us King George V. He also took him away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.