

CHAPTER III

HOW LONDON TOOK THE NEWS

THE state of London outside the House of Commons on that memorable May evening was one of gaping astonishment. As the twilight deepened to night and the illuminated advertisements grew bright, the late editions of the evening papers gave the first intimations of the *coup d'état*, and an increasing driftage of people towards Westminster began. The police, still functioning normally outside Palace Yard, were increased as the crowds, entirely inaggressive and orderly crowds, thickened. Some of the rougher elements from Pimlico and Chelsea showed a mild riotousness, but they were kept well in hand. The guards were under arms in Wellington Barracks, and the normal protection of Buckingham Palace was increased, but there was no need of intervention to protect the monarchy. No one in authority attempted to invoke the military against the Master Paramount, and it is open to question whether the officers, and particularly the junior officers, would have consented to act in such a case. Since the days of the Curragh mutiny there has always been an implicit limit to the powers of the politicians over the army. As the expelled Members of Parliament came out by the various exits into the streets, they had recep-

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tions dependent upon their notoriety and popularity. Generally the crowd showed nothing but an amused sympathy for their débâcle. Their names were shouted after them when they were recognized, usually with the addition of "Good old"—so and so. Women members were addressed affectionately by their Christian names when these were known.

Many of them got away unobserved. The idea that they were the people's agents and representatives had faded out of English life. They were simply people who had "got into Parliament" and now were being turned out of it. When later on the Master Paramount and the chiefs of the Duty Paramount League emerged, they were received, not so much with enthusiasm as with an observant acquiescence. Few failed to mark the great distinction of the Master's presence. The staffs of the new rulers repaired to Downing Street to accelerate the departure of the private establishments of the dismissed ministers and to prepare for the installation of the heads of the provisional government in the official residences. Until a very late hour that night an affectionate crowd besieged Buckingham Palace "to see," as they put it, "that the King was all right." At intervals members of the Royal Family appeared to reassure the people and were received with loyal cries and the better-known verses of the National Anthem. There was no demand for speeches and no interchange of views. It was a *rapprochement* too deep for words.

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

Next day the remarkable news in the morning papers filled London with crowds of visitors from the suburbs and provincial towns. They came up to see what was going on, wandered about for the day, and went home again. All day long, large crowds stagnated about the Houses of Parliament. A multitude of hawkers, selling buns, winkles, oranges, and suchlike provender, did a flourishing trade. Attempts at oratory were suppressed by the police, both there and in Trafalgar Square.

So the new régime took possession. The Crown, as became a constitutional monarchy, accepted the new state of affairs without comment or any gesture of disapproval. A special levee and a garden party to entertain the League of Duty Paramount were arranged at Buckingham Palace, and the Lord Paramount was photographed, for world-wide publicity, tall and erect, in an attitude of firm but entirely respectful resolution, at his monarch's right hand. He was wearing the livery of a Cabinet Minister, the Garter, in which order a timely vacancy had occurred, and the plaque of the Order of Merit. His white and beautifully chiselled face was very grave and still.