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**Opening Extract from...**

# **Crown and Country**

A History of England Through the Monarchy

Written by David Starkey

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## INTRODUCTION



# RANK, ROMANCE AND THE ROYALS

IT SEEMS SUCH A STORY OF TODAY. William is the eventual heir to the oldest and most successful royal house in Europe and, on his marriage, will have a choice of titles that recall the gore and glory of the Middle Ages. Kate, on the other hand, descends from a line of Durham miners and has a mother who is a former air-hostess. The couple met, in the most ordinary way possible, while they were at university together. And, like most of their contemporaries, they have had a shot at being together (and indeed apart) before they decided to get married.

How very different in short from the love story of Charles and Diana – to say nothing of that of the queen and the duke of Edinburgh. No wonder the prime minister, David Cameron, has embraced their engagement as a sort of royal deluxe edition of his Big Society.

But, despite appearances and tabloid pontification, this royal romance is not a new beginning; it is scarcely even a new chapter. For nothing about it is quite what it seems or what we think.

Take their meeting at university. This may indeed be ordinary enough. But St Andrews is no ordinary academic institution. Instead, as the Chancellor boasted at Kate and William's graduation ceremony, it is 'the top match-making university in Britain'.

You will have made lifelong friends; you may have met your husband or wife. Our title as the top match-making university ... signifies so much that is good about St Andrews, so we rely on you to go forth and multiply.

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Study, it would appear, is incidental. Instead this is university as a marriage-market. It is an updated version of the London Season of the first half of the twentieth century with its debutantes and dowagers, and its student couples are as keen to pair off as their predecessors were in any royal court.

Nor are Kate's family as 'common' as some people think. Thanks to Party Pieces, the company in which Kate's mother appears to be the business brains, her parents have made money. Rather a lot of it indeed, since they have offered, with no sense of incongruity, to share the costs of the wedding with the queen and the prince of Wales. They live in a big, rambling, red-brick house, which is set in a garden large enough for William to use as a landing pad for his helicopter. The house is situated in a desirable village and surrounded by the rich, rolling countryside of Home Counties Berkshire. There is a hint of staff and the comfortable countrified life of the prosperous *nouveaux riches*, with their golf clubs and gymkhanas. And, most important of all perhaps, the Middletons have sent all three of their children to the elite public school of Marlborough College. Ever since the nineteenth century the public schools have been a principal gateway to gentility, mass producing little gentlemen and, latterly, little ladies. Kate, with her easy charm, confidence and style, is compelling evidence that the machine is still as purringly effective as ever.

But, it will be objected, this is a 'lifestyle' definition of gentility and class and, as such, essentially modern. What of lineage and ancestry? Are not they the proper and essential markers of class? Especially in earlier periods?

The answer is that they are not, at least in England. Nor have they been for several hundred years. 'As for gentlemen', wrote Sir Thomas Smith in his authoritative *De Republica Anglorum* (1565), 'they be made good cheap in England'.

For whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, who studieth in the universities, who professeth liberal sciences, and to be short, who can live idly and without manual labour and will bear the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman, he shall be called *master*, for that is the title which men give to esquires and other gentlemen, and shall be taken for a gentleman.

For centuries, therefore, and whatever their remoter ancestry, girls like Kate, whose fathers have made money, lived genteely and could groom and educate them appropriately, have crossed the permeable and ever-fluctuating boundary of class and become ladies. They have even married royally. Even in the Middle Ages. Some indeed were also called Kate.

A royal wedding – whether the bride is Kate Middleton in the twenty-first century or her rather humbler predecessor Kate Swynford in the fourteenth – is a ‘brilliant edition of a universal fact’. This means that it shares in the tension common to all marriages. Are the couple marrying for love? Or for property and power? And have they chosen each other? Or is the marriage arranged by their families for mutual advantage?

Nowadays, when even the rich have to earn their living, marriage is – or is supposed to be – about love. And the bride and groom expect to choose each other accordingly. In the Middle Ages, on the other hand, and for long afterwards, wealth was not so much earned as acquired by marriage or inheritance. This meant that marriage was too important to be left to the vagaries of emotion. Instead it was usually arranged and was primarily about property.

This was true, above all, of royal marriages, when it was not just property but the inheritance or acquisition of whole kingdoms that might be at stake. So royal children were married in their cradles and doddering old kings given blushing – and disgusted – young brides.

Feelings did not enter into it.

Except in England where, increasingly, they did.

This older, stranger story also begins, more or less, with another Kate. Katherine Roet was certainly no grander than Katherine Middleton, either by birth or family connections. Her father was a royal herald and her first husband, Sir Hugh Swynford, a royal servant. Yet Katherine finished up as a royal duchess and is the ancestress of all British monarchs from the Tudors to the Windsors.

Most striking of all, Katherine’s own breakthrough came as a result of her employment – modest indeed – as a governess in a royal princely household. John of Gaunt was the third son of King Edward III and, as duke of Lancaster, the richest and most powerful nobleman in England. He had vast lands, which are still the jewel of the Crown Estate, a string of noble castles, like Kenilworth, and a magnificent London palace at the Savoy.

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In 1369 Gaunt's duchess, Blanche died after only nine years of marriage. She left three children and her widower turned to Katherine Swynford to look after them. Soon – as *au pairs* have had a habit of doing throughout the ages – Katherine began to look after Gaunt as well. In 1371, Gaunt remarried a royal princess, Constance of Castile. But his liaison with Katherine continued, and, after the death of her own husband, Sir Hugh, was publicly acknowledged.

The couple had four children, three boys and a girl, who were given the surname 'Beaufort', after one of Gaunt's French estates, and brought up as the duke's own. But the the ascent of Katherine and her family was not yet complete. Duchess Constance died, unlamented, in 1394 and Gaunt remarried Katherine in 1396. Their children were legitimated, first by the pope and then by the king and, within four generations, their descendants were sitting on the throne of England.

Katherine's rise, from mistress to wife and royal duchess, was unique for her own times. For us, of course, it bears a striking resemblance to the career of Camilla Parker Bowles. And the relationship was even more unpopular. Katherine was denounced as 'an enchantress and female devil'; Gaunt became the target of popular anger and disgust that nearly cost him his life in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

But then Gaunt – like Charles – had form with marriage. And the issue, as with Charles, was 'love, whatever that means'. Gaunt, as we have seen, was married three times. Only his second was a wholly conventional dynastic union. Gaunt, no more than second or third in line to the English throne, was in search of a kingdom and Constance, as daughter of the murdered Pedro I of Castile, had a claim to one. Love, even affection, did not enter into it and the couple were indifferent, if not actually hostile, to each other.

Gaunt's first marriage, to Blanche of Lancaster, had been a dynastic union too, since she was heiress to the greatest fortune in England. But it was more: the couple were young, high-born, glamorous and, it would seem, genuinely and passionately in *love*.

Or should that be in *lurve*? For Romantic Love – with its unrequited passions, its vows, its proposals on bended knee, its exchanges of rings and tokens, its protestations of eternal devotion and its living happily ever after – is an invention of the French Middle Ages. Its key text, all 21,000

lines of it, is the *Roman de la Rose*, from which the word *romantic* itself derives. The tradition was assimilated into English in John of Gaunt's own time. And the man who was primarily responsible was Gaunt's brother-in-law. For Geoffrey Chaucer was not only the greatest poet of the age but also husband to Philippa Roet, Katherine Swynford's sister and long-serving lady in waiting to successive duchesses of Lancaster. Chaucer may have translated the *Roman de la Rose*; certainly in countless other works he began to teach the English 'the craft of fyne lovyng'.

And one of his exemplars was Gaunt himself and *his* love for Blanche, which, in allegorical form, is the subject of Chaucer's early, exquisite poem, *The Book of the Duchess*. Gaunt's love, as Chaucer presents it, began when he was a mere stripling. He was overcome by Blanche's beauty: her fair face, her golden hair, and her neck, her throat and her hands all white. His passion became all consuming – she was:

My suffisaunce, my lust, my lif,  
Myn hap, myn hele, and al my blisse,  
My worldes welfare and my lisse,  
And I hires hooly, everydel.

Twice she rejected him, without affectation but with a simple 'nay'. After a year, he tried again. This time she accepted; gave him a ring and the two became one:

Therwith she was alway so trewe,  
Our Ioye was ever yliche newe;  
Our hertes wern so even a payre,  
That never nas that oon contrayre  
To that other, for no wo.

But their happiness was cut cruelly short and in 1369, during the last great visitation of the Black Death, Blanche succumbed. Silenced by grief and bereft of eloquence, all Gaunt can say is: 'She is deed'. And the only consolation Chaucer can offer is equally bleak and economical: 'It is routhe [pity]', he replies.

Of course, the knight in black and 'goode faire White' are not straightforward portraits of Gaunt and Blanche. Chaucer is writing poetry after

all, not prose reportage. Nevertheless, it seems clear that *The Book of the Duchess* embodies our first great royal love story. All the familiar elements are there: youthful infatuation, high romance and – what is the best box-office of all – a tragic ending. Such tales punctuate the succeeding centuries of our history. The staid sort of commentator tends to dismiss them as mere soap-opera or technicolour glitz. Actually, their impact has been as great as the most serious concerns of politics and principle.

This is due, above all, to the characteristically prosaic twist the English gave to the idea of Romantic Love. For the French, love was fairy matter and dwelt, like the unicorn, in a rarefied, otherworldly landscape of verdant and perpetual spring. Above all, it was distinguished from marriage. The delights of love were for the mistress; children, property and the plodding reality of everyday life were for the wife.

The English, however, tried to have their cake and eat it by combining love and marriage. In the English chivalric romances, the lovers marry – just as Gaunt had married Blanche. Similarly, many succeeding monarchs would try to marry for love, or even, like the aging Gaunt, endeavour to make their mistresses into wives.

The consequences were to be writ in blood, dynastic failure and religious revolution.

In 1399 Gaunt's eldest son by Blanche usurped the throne as Henry IV and founded the new Lancastrian dynasty. The second king of the dynasty, Henry V, Gaunt's grandson, carried England to the peak of power by his military genius and single-minded drive. He devoted all his energies to the conquest of France and swore that he would marry no one but Catherine, the daughter of the French king, Charles VI. He achieved both goals and by the time of his premature death in 1422 he had come within a whisker of establishing a dual monarchy of England and France. But his son, Henry VI inherited his grandfather Charles VI's madness and, under his feeble rule, the house of Lancaster lost first France and then England.

The beneficiary was the rival branch of the royal family, the house of York.

Edward, earl of March and son and heir of Richard, duke of York, was only nineteen when he seized the throne in 1461. He was hugely tall, strapping and handsome. He adored women and was irresistibly

attractive to most of them. He also had an ugly streak of violence and had spent much of his short life fighting.

But he met his match.

Elizabeth Woodville was one of the two most controversial women to have been queen of England. She was the first commoner to marry a reigning sovereign. She was the daughter and grand-daughter of household servants – admittedly rather grand ones. She was a widow and already the mother of two sons. And her late husband had been on the losing side in the civil war.

How, with so many disadvantages, did she come to marry the victorious young Edward IV of York? The answer is love.

Or rather lust thwarted that *became* love. For their first meeting was more attempted rape than romantic courtship. Edward was taken with Elizabeth and decided to have her. So he held a dagger to her throat and demanded sex. Elizabeth responded with magnificent coolness. He could kill her, she said. But she would only sleep with him if he married her.

It was an audacious gamble. But it paid off. The king now yielded to the woman. Lust turned to love – and to marriage.

They were married secretly at her parents' house at Grafton Regis in Northamptonshire on 1 May 1464. The following year she was given a magnificent coronation when she was already pregnant with her first child, also christened Elizabeth, who was born on 11 February 1466.

The marriage was an appalling *mésalliance*. But it was made worse by Elizabeth's character. Her portraits show a supremely fashionable face: very pale, presumably whitened, a high forehead exaggerated by plucking back the hairline, and a striking geometric headdress. She was a beauty indeed, but a cold and arrogant one. A modern parallel, whose marriage also shocked both England and the royal family, would be Mrs Simpson. There is the same angularity, the same sense of an outsider.

It is also a question of style. Both women were incredibly stylish – too stylish indeed, like an over-polished stone. They were elegant, but frigidly so. And, most of all, they exuded pure, undiluted acquisitiveness. In the case of Mrs Simpson it was for jewel after jewel. In the case of Elizabeth Woodville it was for property after property; power base after power base; marriage after marriage.

Who could respect kings who seemed to be putty in the hands of such women?

Elizabeth's marriage had begun by outraging every convention. It continued by treading on every toe. Elizabeth was one of a large family. All were now married off into the high aristocracy, much to the disgust of other, more established families who found themselves shut out of the marriage market. Elizabeth also gave Edward a large family of his own of two boys and seven girls. Edward thought they would guarantee his immortality and secure the future of his dynasty. But Elizabeth packed the household of the prince of Wales with her family and friends as well. Thanks to her ruthless acquisitiveness, the Woodvilles were threatening to turn into the real ruling dynasty of England.

The thought was intolerable to many and after Edward's premature death the Yorkist establishment split into pro- and anti-Woodville factions and the regime tore itself apart.

Marriage motivated 'by blind affection and not by rule of reason' – in other words, marriage for love – had turned, as many conservative voices had predicted, into a dynastic disaster.

The end came swiftly. Only two months after Edward IV's death, his son was usurped by his uncle, Richard, duke of Gloucester, who played the anti-Woodville card to devastating effect. Only two years later still, however, the usurper, who reigned as Richard III, was himself defeated and killed in battle by Henry, earl of Richmond. Richmond, proclaimed king as Henry VII, was the Lancastrian claimant through his mother Margaret Beaufort. But the claim was remote in the extreme and, to cement his shaky hold on the throne, Henry VII married Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Edward IV.

The second, but only surviving, son of the marriage succeeded in 1509 as Henry VIII in the first peaceful accession for almost a century. The boy, for he was not yet eighteen, had a remarkable lineage. On his father's side he was descended from a lovechild of Gaunt's liaison with, and eventual marriage to, Katherine Swynford; on his mother's he was grandson of the even more flagrant love-match of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville.

Did he inherit the seeds of love from his ancestors? It would seem so for he was perhaps the most famous lover to have sat on the throne of

England. And certainly his love-affairs, and their tempestuous conclusions, had the greatest impact.

Henry's upbringing played its part as well. As a second son, he was not given the strict, male-dominated upbringing considered appropriate for the heir to the throne. His short-lived elder brother Arthur was sent off to Ludlow to rule Wales and fit himself to be king of England; Henry was kept at home. He was brought up by his mother and with his sisters in a largely female household till his early teens. It was a most unusual experience for a Tudor boy of the upper classes and it turned Henry into a man who needed women as no king had done before – or perhaps since. He could not live without them. But it had to be the right woman and he had to love and marry her. So intense was this quest for marital perfection – and such the frailty of womankind – that Henry, famously, married six times. And, as we know, there were casualties,

Henry's education was also important. He was taught French by a native-speaker and learned to read and write it fluently, perhaps almost as a native. This meant that, alongside his knowledge of the classics, which he acquired from a succession of distinguished Latin teachers, Henry was also soaked in the French literature of courtly love. He saw himself as a hero of romance, winning his lady with his lance. Every woman was a damsel in distress; every fortress a castle dangerous. And it was not only in the imagination: Henry was a superb jousting; a more-than-adequate poet who wrote (against weak competition, it is true) some of the best verse of his generation; and a talented musician, who excelled as both performer and composer. Indeed, his 'Pastime with Good Company', for which he wrote both the words and music, became the most popular lyric of the day. Henry in short was a crowned Don Quixote, except that his fantasies were real. Or at least his power made them appear so.

Something of this appeared even in his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon, where its dynastic and diplomatic foundations were overlaid by at least a veneer of high romance: 'I loved where I did marry', the king proclaimed in one of his early poems.

But it was in his second, protracted courtship of Anne Boleyn that his romantic yearnings found their mate. For Anne was brought up in the same Frenchified courtly tradition as Henry. Or rather, while he absorbed it at second-hand in England, she experienced the real thing, first in the

French-speaking household of the Archduchess Margaret, Regent of the Netherlands; then in the dazzling court of Francis I of France. And even in France she shone and was paid the highest compliment a Frenchman can pay: 'you would never have thought her English', an observer wrote, 'but taken her for a fine French lady'.

Anne was thus a swan among geese when she returned to the English court: the greatest poet of the age made passionate love to her but was spurned; the heir to the richest earldom became her suitor and betrothed her; and the king threw himself at her feet.

Literally. Henry's early love-letters to Anne are written in French in the high courtly style. He is prostrate; he proffers his services; he is her secretary; he languishes and only a word from her can save him. She is his *Mistress*.

But that was the one role that Anne was determined not to play. Like Elizabeth Woodville before her, she would be wife and queen or nothing. And Henry, like *his* grandfather Edward IV before him – whom he so much resembled in build, appearance and character – took the bait. They would marry, he swore. 'Either there [marriage], or nowhere'.

Henry's letters now change character. He is no longer the court lover but the passionate husband-to-be. Even the signature changes. Henry signs himself with the royal monogram, 'HR' (*Henricus Rex*) enclosing a heart inscribed with Anne's monogram, 'AB'. Sometimes he elaborates. He is 'immovable [in his determination]'. He 'seeks no other [than Anne]'. He enters into complex word play on her name and *an* (year) in French and *anno* (year) in Latin. And Anne no doubt replied in kind.

Here in short are two lovers in love with being in love. They play the game of love. They speak their own private language and they inhabit their own private world.

So long as they remained in that private world, all was well. But once they entered on the public stage of matrimony disaster befell. Anne, so masterful in the art of love, was temperamentally unsuited to being that shrunken thing, a wife. Above all, she failed to give Henry a son. The result was that Henry fell out of love with her almost as quickly as he had once thrown himself at her feet. Love turned to hate and marriage to divorce – and death.

The strange cycle of Henry's love then turned again. And again.

\* \* \*

Elizabeth I, Henry VIII's daughter by Anne Boleyn, succeeded to the throne in 1558. She was the child of a love-match, admittedly one that went horribly wrong. And love, or rather the incompatibility in her case of love and marriage, is a dominant theme of her life and reign. For she was not, emphatically, a natural virgin. She loved men and children; she loved being in love or playing at being in love. She had been in love in earnest with her then step-father, Thomas, Lord Seymour of Sudeley, when she was still in her teens. And she fell passionately in love with Robert Dudley, her master of the Horse, soon after she became queen. Dudley was handsome and masterful. But he was widely distrusted and his reputation was blasted by the fact that both his father and grandfather had been executed as traitors.

It would, in short, have been madness to marry him and Elizabeth had the sense, unlike her cousin Mary Queen of Scots, to pull back from the brink. Dudley was transmuted from consort-to-be into favourite and Elizabeth retired, hurt, from the mating game. She never fully re-entered it. The dilemma on which she was impaled was neatly summarized by a contemporary politician: anybody that Elizabeth *could* marry, she would not, because she did not find them attractive; and anybody that she *would* marry, she could not because they were not of the right status.

Elizabeth never resolved the issue. Instead in time she turned her virgin state into a matter of policy and propaganda. It worked. But it meant that when she died in 1603, the direct line of the English royal house died with her.

After Elizabeth's death, James VI of Scotland, who descended from Margaret, elder sister of Henry VIII, succeeded as James I of England, or Great Britain as the new joint kingdom became known.

There followed three centuries of rule by foreign dynasties: Franco-Scottish, Dutch and German. And their marriage customs were foreign too. Out went love and low origins; in came strict rules about rank and suitability. But as rules about the choice of wife and queen became more restrictive, love – and lust – found their outlet elsewhere.

The age of license and the mistress had begun.

The Stuarts were a recent and insecure dynasty. Their title was weak and Scotland itself peripheral. The acquisition of England helped. But still they sought marriage with the great royal houses of Europe, the French

and the Spanish, to reinforce their status and dignity. But, even with this prudential and calculating approach to matrimony, romance and chivalry cast their spell.

Marriage negotiations were opened for James's heir, Charles to marry the Spanish *infanta*. The negotiations stalled, and Charles and his friend and his father's favourite, the duke of Buckingham, resolved to journey to Spain to woo and win the lady in person. They departed like two knights in romance on a chivalric quest. But the land of Don Quixote proved unresponsive. The Spanish demands for Catholic toleration were too high and the *infanta* herself was loath to marry a heretic. So Charles and Buckingham were repulsed in their knightly quest and returned to England hurt and breathing vengeance. They would fight Spain and Charles would marry in France.

And so it came to pass. His bride was the fifteen-year-old Henrietta Maria, daughter of Henry IV of France. The marriage began disastrously, with tears and tantrums on the part of the youthful bride. But things settled down and, as sometimes happens in arranged marriages, the couple fell deeply and devotedly in love *after* matrimony. The contrast with James I's rackets court was notable and their family life became a model of decency and decorum.

This cut little ice with most of Charles I's subjects. For England – as a result primarily of Henry VIII's matrimonial adventures – was Protestant while Henrietta Maria was proudly, flagrantly Catholic. The result was to taint the monarchy with an alien creed. The perception played an important part in the outbreak of the Civil War which led to the downfall of the monarchy and the execution of the king in 1649. And it became even more pronounced after the Restoration in 1660 and Henrietta Maria's return to England as queen mother. Charles II, her eldest son, was received into the church of Rome on his deathbed while her younger son, who succeeded as James II in 1685, had converted long before. This was tolerable since his two children by his late first wife had been brought up as staunch Protestants. But in 1688 James's second Catholic wife, Mary of Modena, gave birth to a son who would certainly be brought up as a Catholic.

The prospect of a Catholic succession was the last straw and James was overthrown in the Glorious Revolution. The revolutionary settlement also introduced the first, formal limitation on the marriage of an

English sovereign. No future monarch, it declared, could be Catholic or could marry one.

And, over three hundred years later, the rule still holds. Happily, Kate Middleton's religion, in so far as it is discernible, appears to be of the right sort.

In 1701 the anti-Catholicism of the monarchy was further entrenched by the Act of Settlement. This transferred the succession to the only available Protestant heirs, the German family of Guelph, who were the rulers of the north German state of Hanover.

The result in 1714 was the accession of the Elector Georg of Hanover to the British throne as King George I.

The Hanoverians brought with them the full rigour of German dynastic customs, particularly with regard to marriage. These stood at the opposite extreme to the free and easy English practice. In the German tradition, social rank was legally defined and the choice of marriage partner had to follow suit: nobleman had to marry noblewoman; prince had to wed princess. Failure to do so led to *dérogance*: the issue from the marriage took the mother's inferior rank and became ineligible to inherit their father's status and public position. Positively applied, these rules also led to the idea of 'morganatic marriage'.

This was a private marriage for a public figure. The marriage was valid and the children were legitimate. But the wife did not assume her husband's status, nor were the children able to inherit his royal or princely titles.

These German dynastic rules were never incorporated directly into English law. But they came in by the back door with the Royal Marriages Act of 1772. This declared that no royal marriage was valid without the consent of the king – and the king saw himself as guardian of the full rigour of dynastic tradition. The effect was to give the sanction of English law to the deeply un-English marriage customs of the royal house.

A clash between English and German values was now inevitable. For though the royal house was German, its children were brought up in England and acquired English values – especially in the matter of emotional satisfaction. George III (1760–1820) and Queen Charlotte had some seven sons. Only the duke of York made an officially approved marriage with a German princess. But the couple had no children and, in what is also rather English behaviour, lavished their affection on their

dogs. The remaining sons entered into liaisons with English women. The resulting relationships were often long-lasting, affectionate and fertile, with the duke of Clarence and the actress Mrs Jordan, for example, having some ten children. Similarly George, prince of Wales, found the love of his life with Mrs Fitzherbert, who was ‘fat, fair and forty’. Unfortunately, however, she was not only English but Catholic, which meant that their marriage, though probably canonically valid, was not recognized.

But in 1794, George, overwhelmed by debt thanks to his luxurious lifestyle and even more lavish building projects, succumbed. He offered a deal: in exchange for having his debts paid, he would throw over Mrs Fitzherbert and marry the required German princess. The chosen bride was Caroline of Brunswick. It was loathing at first sight. The prince’s reluctance was so obvious that the archbishop of Canterbury, who was conducting the wedding service, paused meaningfully after reciting the words ‘no lawful impediment’. And matters only got worse on the marriage night. The bride was ugly and stank; the groom drank himself to oblivion with cognac and was found the following morning with his head in the hearth. They never spent another night together. Nevertheless, successful intercourse had taken place and a daughter, named Charlotte after her grandmother the queen, was born. Princess Charlotte was intelligent, gay and tomboyish. But she died in childbirth in 1817 after only eighteen months of marriage.

Charlotte’s death triggered a dynastic crisis. King George III and Queen Charlotte had had twelve children who reached maturity. But, with the princess’s death, there survived not one single legitimate grandchild.

The remaining royal dukes were now required to do their duty and a rush to the altar followed. Cambridge, Kent and Clarence all disposed of their English mistresses and married German princesses. The victor in the procreation stakes was Kent, to whom a daughter was born in 1819.

She was called Victoria, after her mother.

In 1837, Victoria succeeded at the age of only eighteen. She was lively, wilful – and unmarried. Her remote cousin Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, had already been suggested as a possible husband. But, as queen regnant, Victoria could not simply be ordered to marry; she also disapproved of arranged marriages and had a powerful appreciation of male beauty.

In 1839 Albert visited England again and something clicked. He is *'beautiful'*, Victoria confided to her diary. She, as queen, proposed and they were married the following February in the Chapel Royal, St James's.

The bride's orange-blossom trimmed headdress trembled throughout the ceremony and she developed a blinding headache. But then all dissolved in passion and bliss.

Victoria and Albert's happy marriage rescued the moral reputation of the monarchy from the degradation into which it had sunk under her 'wicked' Regency uncles.

But there was a price: it became more German than ever. Sitting at their adjacent desks at Osborne, Victoria and Albert spoke German to each other. Their artistic tastes were German; their music was German; the style of their family life – complete with the Germanic importation of Christmas trees – was German. Most importantly, of their nine children, six married German princes or princesses, two members of the Danish and Russian royal houses and only one at home, to a Scottish nobleman.

The result was that at the beginning of the twentieth century the dynasty was almost as German as it had been when the Hanoverians first arrived in Britain two hundred years before. Identities were fused, how far and how deeply we have almost forgotten: the German Kaiser Wilhelm II was Victoria's eldest and favourite grandson; the commander of the British navy was a German princeling.

None of this mattered in the cosy world of cross-Channel monarchy. But in 1914 this world was shattered for ever when Britain declared war on Germany and the First World War broke out. The British royal family, and every member of it, had to make the choice, however painful.

Were you English? Or German? For you could no longer be both.

The year was 1917. The First World War was at its height. At home, the fleet had mutinied at Spithead; abroad the Russian Empire was about to collapse and everywhere revolution was in the air. George V, king-emperor of Great Britain and William's great-great-grandfather, was the least likely of revolutionaries. He was a stiff-backed ex-sailor; punctilious in his dress and formal in his manners, whose only recreations were his stamp albums, his weather-gauge and his coverts of game-birds, of which he slaughtered prodigious numbers. And yet he had shrewd political

instincts and even shrewder advisers. Together they decided to fight revolution with revolution.

Their enterprise was no less than to reinvent the British Monarchy. The first step was to make it British. Ever since the accession of the House of Hanover two hundred years previously in 1714, the royal family had been German – in blood, in its first language and, above all, in its name: Guelph or, latterly, Wettin or Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.

With Germany as the enemy, this was impossible and George resolved to change it. After a bit of discreet market-testing, he came up with the quintessentially English name of Windsor. With its echoes of Shakespeare and soft-soap it was the perfect choice. It also led to the only recorded joke by Kaiser Wilhelm II, George's cousin and opponent in the war, who declared that he was looking forward to the next performance of Shakespeare's 'Merry Wives of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha'!

But the change of name was only the first step.

What had kept the royal family German for two hundred years were its marriage customs. So George changed those as well. Hitherto, the royal family had followed the German practice. This required members of ruling houses only to marry people of equivalent rank – in other words princes and princesses of other German dynasties. Instead George declared by order in council that henceforth his children would be able to marry Englishmen and Englishwomen. 'It was an historic day', he confided to his diary.

It was. It sounds so simple. And yet the seed of everything that has followed, right up to the marriage of William and Kate, is there. Royal weddings – even to unknown and usually unattractive German princesses – have always aroused a lot of popular interest. But it was difficult to present such arranged dynastic marriages as romantic love stories. Once the brides were English and pretty, however, the floodgates of schmalz opened.

They did most conspicuously in the case of Prince William's great-grandparents, the future George VI and Queen Elizabeth (later the queen mother), who were married in 1923. The relationship was even on-off as well, since Elizabeth refused George's first two proposals. After she had accepted his third, the media storm broke. The newly-illustrated popular press and women's magazines featured endless photographs of the bride, her family and homes. Her trousseau and clothes were scrutinized and the

interiors of the couple's new home at 145 Piccadilly pored over. Elizabeth even gave a press interview, though the appalled reaction of her father-in-law, George V, made sure that it was her last.

If Kate really wants to know what lies ahead, she could do worse than flick through the files of those yellowing cuttings.

There was even the same interest in the choice of venue for the wedding. In the Hanoverian centuries, and under the Stuart dynasty before that, royal weddings were semi-private affairs. They were held, almost invariably, in the Chapel Royal at St James's Palace. The chapel would be magnificently decorated. But nothing could disguise its mean interior and poky proportions.

The royal revolution of 1917 changed this too. A royal wedding was now a national wedding. Everybody was interested and everybody – metaphorically at least – was invited. Only one building was big enough or symbolic enough: Westminster Abbey.

In 1923 the wedding address in the Abbey was given by Cosmo Gordon Lang, Archbishop of York. It was solemn, even intimidating. 'You cannot', he told the bride and groom, 'resolve that [your marriage] will be happy. But you can and will resolve that it shall be noble'. Lang, good priest that he was, recognized the vagaries of human nature. But, in the case of the young royal couple before him, he required that those vagaries be hidden by a public facade: whatever the reality of their marriage, George and Elizabeth were required to keep up appearances.

Above all they must never, ever contemplate divorce. Ever since the Reformation, the law of England on marriage had corresponded more or less to the Church of England's teaching on the indissolubility of Christian marriage. This meant that divorce was difficult, expensive and subject to profound social stigma. Pressure to reform these impossibly restrictive laws grew on either side of the First World War. Lang set himself to oppose the movement for liberalization and did so with remarkable success. But his masterstroke was his wedding address of 1923 which enlisted the monarchy to his cause.

The result was a paradox. Once the demand for love had been an escape from the shackles of royal convention. Now a royal couple were required to have a happy, loving marriage – or least to keep up the appearance of one. One set of rules, it turned out, had only been replaced by another. The old German dynastic rules governing royal marriages had

been discarded. But the price was the imposition of the new rule of compulsory marital happiness. And the new rule had the potential to make the old seem like freedom itself.

Especially for the man who would be king.

For George, duke of York, was only the second son of George V. The heir was Edward, prince of Wales, who was the antithesis of his shy, stuttering, conventional brother. The prince was handsome and dashing. He adored trousers with turn-ups, cocktails, flying, America, fast cars, Art Deco and every other fad and fashion of modernity. He also set the fashion himself, with his boyish figure and excellent dress sense. Above all, he was a confident and insatiable womanizer.

The only problem was that he preferred married women and showed no inclination to marry himself – until he met his match in Wallis Simpson. Wallis was Edward's alter ego. He loved America; she *was* American. And she was as smart, fashionable and ever-so-up-to-the-minute as he was. She was also much the stronger character and he yielded adoringly to her influence.

They would marry, he decided and nothing should stop them – not even the fact that Mrs Simpson was a married woman with one divorce already behind her. For so extreme a *mésalliance* it is necessary to go back to Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville. Or Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Wallis and Edward even had a similar private language. And it too centred on a monogram: 'WE'. 'WE' stood, of course, for Wallis and Edward. But it took on a life of its own: 'WE' together. 'WE' different. 'WE' non-conformist. 'WE' doing what 'WE' want, not what 'WE' are told to do.

'WE', in short, against the world.

But the world proved unforgiving. In the midst of their affair, George V died. The next evening, the prime minister was to broadcast to the nation from Downing Street. Lang's friend, John Reith, the director general of the BBC, was invited to dinner and asked to comment on the script. He made crucial alterations 'bringing in the moral authority, honour and dignity of the throne'. But Edward would not be warned. His private secretary, Clive Wigram, then sought to invoke the law and consulted the Lord Chancellor 'about the marriage laws of a sovereign'. He expected to

be told that marriage with a divorced woman, like Mrs Simpson, was explicitly excluded. He must have been surprised to be informed instead that the laws spoke only of marriage with a Roman Catholic and were silent on the subject of a union with a divorcée.

But if the law could not stop Edward, public and political opinion, astutely manipulated by the prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, could. Baldwin backed Edward into a corner and Edward, already riddled with doubts about the 'kinging business', failed to put up much of a fight. He abdicated on 11 December 1936 after reigning less than a year. That evening he was at last allowed to broadcast to the nation:

You must believe me [he said] when I tell you I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as king as I would wish without the help and support of the woman I love.

The new Windsor rules of loving – but holy – matrimony had claimed their first victim. He would not be the last.

His removal had also been easy because he had no direct heirs while his younger brother George already had two daughters, Princesses Elizabeth and Mary Rose. It was thus straightforward, as well as sound dynastic policy, to shunt Edward VIII aside and replace him with George VI. This is why the Abdication Crisis was over almost as quickly as it had begun. For the royal family it was a terrible trauma; for the nation at large, it was a nine-day wonder.

Soon it was as though the brief reign of Edward VIII had never been. Reith and Lang could breathe again, confident that in the new king they had a monarch who would play his appointed part. He was ably supported by his wife and, in time, by his eldest daughter Elizabeth, on whom the demands of royalty sat as lightly as they had been burdensome to her uncle.

And she was especially fortunate in the matter of love. She was swept off her feet by her handsome, sea-faring cousin, Prince Philip of Greece, and the two were married at Westminster Abbey in 1947. The ceremony, the archbishop of Canterbury declared was

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exactly the same as it would be for any cottager who might be married this afternoon in some small country church in a remote village in the Dales: the same prayers are offered; the same blessings given.

It was indeed the same, apart from the twelve wedding cakes at the reception and the 2,666 wedding presents, including a solid gold coffee set and a 54 carat pink diamond. But the imputed ordinariness made the ostentatious wealth somehow all right – like a welcome shaft of sunlight amid the grey austerity of postwar Britain.

Indeed, the ordinariness was a sort of pathetic fallacy. The pathetic fallacy proper is a literary device which attributes human feelings to the impersonal forces of nature. The pathetic fallacy of the Windsor monarchy – or rather of its subjects – was to attribute the democratic unction of ordinariness to the most extraordinary family of all. The result was that, while other thrones tottered and fell, the British monarchy seemed impregnable. ‘Soon’, one of the growing band of former monarchs, ex-King Farouk of Egypt, prophesied, ‘there will only be five Kings left: the King of England, the King of Spades, the King of Clubs, the King of Hearts, and the King of Diamonds’.

Princess Elizabeth succeeded in 1952 after the early death of her father at the age of only 56. At her Accession Council she announced her intention ‘always [to] work as my father did’. She has kept her promise.

Her children have found it far less easy and divorce has dogged all but one of them. Especially Prince Charles. At first, his marriage to Lady Diana Spencer seemed the embodiment of the Windsor dream. Are you ‘in love’, the couple was asked? ‘Of course’, Diana replied. ‘Whatever “in love” means’, answered the prince.

Not even the Abbey was big enough for the expectations aroused by their wedding and St Paul’s Cathedral was chosen instead. ‘This is the stuff of which fairy tales are made’, said the archbishop in his address. Only one previous prince of Wales had been married there: Arthur, eldest son of Henry VII, who was dead within six months of the wedding.

It was not a happy precedent.

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The fairy-tale wedding, notoriously, turned to nightmare and the prospect of divorce loomed. It was back to 1936 and the Abdication Crisis. But the balance of forces was different. This time, the Establishment spoke with forked tongues. Separation and even divorce would present no constitutional barrier to Prince Charles's eventual accession, the prime minister stated – certainly correctly. Even the archbishop of Canterbury temporized. Nevertheless, there was widespread unease. There was a feeling that the 'rules' (even if they were only unwritten conventions) had been broken and that Prince Charles had somehow 'broken his compact with the Nation', as the *Sun* put it.

Public opinion also decided, as public opinion tends to, that an older, rather unattractive man was in the wrong and a young and pretty woman was in the right. Finally, the Wars of the Wales, in which Charles and Diana slugged it out in public and traded scandal for scandal, brought the House of Windsor, for the first time in its history, into widespread contempt.

But times and values have changed – not least thanks to Diana herself. William, as his re-use of his mother's engagement ring shows, is profoundly attached to Diana's memory. And he seems to have found a kindred spirit in Kate. The result is that their relationship, in this regard at least, appears different from any previous Windsor couple. There is not a trace of high romance or grand, Mills & Boon-style passion. Instead, it is pragmatic, remarkably equal, and based (so they have told us) on a shared sense of humour. It also has already lasted some eight years.

Despite this good, level-headed beginning, they will be under enormous pressure to turn into figures from a romance and become Prince Charming and Cinderella in Jimmy Choos. The press wants it; the people want it; the world wants it. We all want our fairy tale.

It will be very difficult for them to resist. But it will be greatly to their advantage if they do. It will also be to ours since it will help us to admit that family values have indeed changed and that high romance and the workaday reality of marriage – even princely marriage – have very little to do with each other.

They will be under another pressure too: to put on a good show. For another of the paradoxes of the Windsor monarchy is that it has carried royal spectacle to heights of splendour and perfection rarely equalled

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even in the glory days of kingly power under the Plantagenets and Tudors. This is because a People's Monarchy is part of popular entertainment, which has high standards when it comes to spectacle.

On the other hand, siren voices have been raised to tell them to cut back. Remember the recession, says one Gradgrind; away with flummery, demands another kill-joy. This is very strange. The most ordinary couples try to make a bit of a splash with their weddings. How much more is expected of a royal union?

For this is the real point. As Walter Bagehot pointed out long ago in his masterly analysis of the Victorian monarchy, royalty is interesting while republics are boring. This is why that great republic, America, despite having got rid of George III, cannot get enough of the British monarchy. 'Kate and William are HUGE news here. Is anything else going on in the world?' an American friend has just emailed me.

Kate and William are now the latest stars of that great international circus. There are terrible dangers, as William knows only too well from his mother. But, helped by Kate, he shows signs of having learned that he must do things a bit differently and pour the wine of new, more modest values into the old bottle of the Windsor Family Monarchy.

Let's hope that it turns out to be champagne and doesn't go flat too quickly!

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