

IN the year 1717, on the 28th of May, a band of musicians was engaged in playing upon its instruments outside the famous old Swan Inn in Bridgwater, incited thereto, as was alleged, by the worthy Mayor of that year, Ferdinando Anderdon. Within the hostelry a party of gentlemen had gathered together, for mutual edification and for celebrating the due rites of hospitality. It was, indeed, a great day ; the birthday of His Majesty King George the First, Sovereign of the United Kingdom and Elector of Hanover. Now in a strange way it transpired that this presumably innocent and loyal feast became tinged with suspicion. The musicians were asked by the town authorities whether it was true that they had, at the Mayor's desire, played the tune, *The King shall enjoy his own again*. Horrified at the thought, the minstrels stoutly declared upon oath that they had done no such thing.

A few years earlier a similar party of Bridgwater men had met together at the same old inn, and, as it would seem, spent a very happy evening indeed. There was eating and drinking, and singing of songs. Yet, when it was solemnly alleged against them that they had drunk to the health of *the King over the water*, not one of the guests could remember such an incident. The details of the toast-list had vanished from their memories.

Within a short time, however, a clearer case came to the knowledge of the alert loyalists of the town. A man, one William Erie, was standing near to the High Cross, gazing with some interest upon an individual who was then fixed in the pillory for having uttered words of sedition. The observer also saw one Edward Parry, a trooper, and heard the latter aver that the man in the pillory was an acquaintance of his, and was one of his countrymen, and that *the Pretender was his King*. Erie hastened to protest with the discreet ejaculation, *King George is my King*. Thus it would appear that he whom the loyalists called the old Pretender, and who was known and loved amongst the Jacobites as Prince James Francis Edward Stuart, the Chevalier de St. George, had friends in Bridgwater when the eighteenth century had begun to run its course.

King William the Third died on March 8th, 1702, his wife Mary having predeceased him some eight years. In spite of many good qualities, he was not really popular with his subjects. His foreign birth was against him, and so, in a far greater degree, was his

intense reserve. In the course of a ride on horseback, William's steed stumbled over a mole-hill, and threw his rider. The King never recovered from the shock, and the incident gave rise to the favourite Jacobite toast, *To the Little Gentleman in Black Velvet*. It will be remembered that in 1689, when the Declaration of Rights was drawn up, the crown of Great Britain was settled upon Anne in succession to William the Third. William's wife, Mary, was the second daughter of James the Second by his first wife, Anne Hyde, who was the daughter of Edward Hyde, afterwards Earl of Clarendon, the famous historian and lawyer. Mary died leaving her husband a childless widower, and therefore the obvious necessity arose, in course of time, for making yet further regulations for securing the succession to the throne, while providing also for the exclusion of the exiled Stuarts. This was settled, before Anne came to the crown, by the Act of Settlement which was passed on March 12th, 1701. The situation was indeed a curious one. Anne, born on February 6th, 1665, was married at the age of nineteen to Prince George of Denmark, brother of the reigning sovereign of that country. She had seventeen children, all of whom save one died at birth or in very early infancy. That one, the poor little Duke of Gloucester, lived on till the year 1700, and then passed away. Thus she also was childless when she ascended the English throne, and before the Act of Settlement was passed. It became clear that something had to be planned.

The matter was solved, as such things usually are, by a combination of conflicting principles and convenient probabilities. It was not an easy matter to set about looking for a successor to a throne, and especially to the English throne. Relatives and descendants and connections of English royal families were dotted about all over Europe. There were plenty of people willing, nay eager, to oblige the English people by consenting to come, when Queen Anne's reign should end, to rule over them. But this amounted to nothing. Two things were absolutely necessary. Some royal personage must be hit upon who could substantiate some reasonably valid claim, and at the same time the banished Stuarts must remain banished still. There must be a link with the past monarchy, for old sake's sake, and in order to preserve at least the aroma of kingly descent. But the Stuart methods were never to be permitted in England again.

The solution of the difficulty was not a brilliant one, yet it was convenient. It was agreed to choose the Electress Sophia of Hanover, who on her mother's side possessed some connecting links with King Charles the First, and who also was at the head of one of those reigning German Houses that might be relied upon to bear no love to the outlawed descendants of that unfortunate monarch. Moreover Sophia the Electress had a son George, who also had a son, and thus there was a probability of successors to the English sovereignty. Sophia was not greatly enamoured of the offer made to her, yet it presented the possibility of benefits to her family, and after the fashion of those days she looked at it chiefly from that point of view. She accepted, and the deed was done. The grand-daughter of James the First of England undertook, if Providence should so order events, to become Queen of England at Queen Anne's death. She never succeeded to that throne, but her son George, thirteen years later, became the first English monarch of the House of Brunswick. The question of the succession was settled for a while. Yet the Act of Settlement brought no small disturbance to England in the early part of the eighteenth century. And it grievously affected Bridgwater, and Bridgwater people too.

For there was another side to the question, a side which appealed strongly to the English adherents of the Stuarts, among whom, as we have seen, were some Bridgwater men who kept high festival at the Swan Inn. When James the Second bade farewell to the Mayor and Aldermen of the ancient borough in 1686, they, not unnaturally, hoped they might never see his face again. Their desire was fulfilled. James escaped to France shortly afterwards, and his place in England knew him no more. But by his second wife, Mary, daughter of the Duke of Modena, he already had a son, James Francis Edward, born at St. James's Palace on the 10th of June, 1688. Thus at Queen Anne's accession this son would be about fourteen years of age. Moreover, the boy — the young Chevalier — was, it could not be forgotten, half-brother to the Queen. King James was dead now. He passed away at St. Germain's in September, 1701. But James's son remained, and with him a whole crop of possibilities which eventually ripened into actualities. Anne was a woman of deep natural affection, and her devotion to her relatives was extreme. *My poor brother*, she sometimes said of the young James, whom, fortunately for her own peace of mind, she

never had seen in her life. The Queen was swayed in two directions. She was a staunch member of the Church of England, and she would have none of Rome. She wished to be a constitutional sovereign, and to keep her realm at peace. Yet she was a Stuart ; as it turned out, the last English Stuart sovereign. Wisdom bade her adhere to the letter of the Act of Succession, and wait for George to come in after her death. Feeling, desire, the ardent wish of her tenacious nature to provide that one of her own blood should follow her, all impelled her towards the opposite way. Queen Anne had a will of her own, even as James the Second had. James, we know, was adamant as regards one thing — his Faith. For his adherence to the Roman Faith he wrecked his kingdom and lost his crown. Had he changed his Faith he might have saved his seat upon the throne. This he scorned to do, and for this conviction he deserves the honour of all good men. His son, the young Chevalier, was like-minded. He too was a devout Catholic, and when appeal-ed to, flatly declined to be a Protestant. Anne could hardly understand all this. Her intense-ness, such as it was, vented itself upon personal and domestic affections. She could not understand her father's and her brother's passion for the belief of their forefathers. It was always getting them into trouble ; that she could easily perceive. She was sure that the Church of England position was better for her people, and so she clung to it with all her might. The Royal Arms which are now hung upon the west wall of St. Mary's Church, bearing the initials of Anna Regina, and dating from the year 1712, explain her position thoroughly. Poor Queen, she loved her kith and kin ; it was pain and anguish to her to see the Royal House of Stuart pass away. Yet, she must keep her word. She must maintain the existing order. She must yield, at last, to the House of Brunswick. George the Elector would follow her, and the old traditions would utterly pass away.

Such was the state of mind in England in Queen Anne's days. In London, of course, feelings ran high. The Whigs were in favour of George the Elector, the Tories mostly favoured the Stuart cause. The time had not yet come when the sovereign, in his personal capacity of chief ruler in England, could be as regards his individual attitude, his descent from the ancient Blood Royal, or his private likes and dislikes, a personage to whom the people were indifferent. The days of personal kingly government were not ended as yet, by

any means. It is true that in William the Third's time the parliamentary chambers came to exercise a power which they had never possessed before. No army could be maintained save through the supplies which Parliament voted. The King's Ministers exercised an immense power, which they have never since lost. The days were gone when rulers — as Charles the First, and afterwards Oliver Cromwell — could dispense altogether with a Parliament, and govern without one. For the first time, under Queen Anne, eloquence, argument, and reason began to exercise their proper influence in the nation's debates. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet grew into being, constituting an enormous restriction upon the Sovereign's action and will. Debate took its place as one of the chief ingredients in fashioning English policy. The centre of gravity ceased to be in the person of the monarch ; it lay within the precincts of Parliament. Yet despite these developments it must also be borne in mind that these advances in the mode of government grew slowly, and that parliamentary influence had, even in its initial stages in the eighteenth century, more real power within the walls of Westminster than the people generally grasped. The inner circle knew that Harley and Bolingbroke and other great Ministers pulled the strings and dictated the policy ; the outsiders — notably in the provincial towns — scarcely realised this as yet. The reality of power is frequently most potently exercised when its existence is scarcely beginning to be known. London knew, and held its tongue. The country towns guessed a little, and were content. For the time they were quite satisfied to discuss the succession to the throne, and to let other matters wait.

It is not entirely easy to conceive quite truly of the social circumstances of that time. The chief English towns then, after London, were Bristol, York, Exeter, Nottingham, Shrewsbury, Winchester, Canterbury, and, as a place of pleasure and fashion, Bath. Bridgwater, it will be seen, occupied a highly favourable position as lying between Bristol and Exeter, and it was probably better acquainted with the doings and sayings of the great ones of the realm than most towns of its size. Its relative importance as a port was also far in excess of what it is to-day. News came to it, though tardily, both by sea and by land. Bath was growing to be an important centre of fashion and of Court gossip, and it came soon to be a necessity for all people of rank and fashion, as Beau Nash

would have said, to be seen there at times. Later on its reputation for high society — and for its gaming-tables and drawing-rooms — grew apace. Many a squire and squire's lady from Somerset travelled thither in the family coach, and some of them left behind them there sums of money which made disastrous inroads upon the paternal estate. The population of London then was about three-quarters of a million, or about one-tenth of the estimated population of England and Wales. In Bridgwater the population in 1695 was about two thousand two hundred and odd inhabitants, and within the boundaries of Chilton, Haygrove, and Dunwear there were six hundred more. The whole area then contained considerably fewer than three thousand people, and it was not until 1797 that the town had five hundred houses and three thousand inhabitants. In Queen Anne's days, however, a place inhabited by two thousand people was a town of importance, and was held to be justified, so to say, in giving itself airs. The villages also held a far greater relative importance than they do now.

We are apt, with singular lack of insight, to bestow feelings of sincere pity upon the people of that time. It is true that their lot was circumscribed, and probably also true — though in a diminishing degree — that their sober wishes never learned to stray. Even in London the chief streets were, very sparsely, dimly lit by a few wretched oil lamps.

The way of travellers must have been as hard as that of transgressors, for there were no police, and there were petty thieves in abundance. The roads were execrable, and the watch provided by the civic fathers was incompetent to a very painful degree. To go to one's home in a London or Westminster street after dark was to court robbery, and not infrequently robbery accompanied by violence. If these things were so even in the metropolis, in what condition were the country towns? We know that they were ill paved, or not paved at all ; that the lantern was the usual means of lighting ; that most people — unless they were holding revels in some favourite inn — stayed at home as soon as evening time closed in. Very few books were to be had, and no newspapers. The daily post-office conveniences did not exist as yet. There was, in fact, but little need for them, for very few people thought of writing letters at all, and the great majority had not acquired the art of writing. To be able to read was an accomplishment highly prized, by reason of its exceeding rarity. There was a

calm in men's manners which this day knows not, a calm perhaps begotten of the necessary habit of almost always staying at home. There was ample time for conversation, and the chief opportunity for this was at the inns, where men met ; in the markets, and in one another's houses. Agriculture, of course, was the staple and overwhelmingly important occupation, and as a topic of conversation it must easily have eclipsed every rival. Those who travelled acquired a fortuitous importance which was in itself some compensation for the perils of the road, and the oft-repeated anecdote of a man's journey to London would provide him with joy for a lifetime. The rich who travelled used (it was a necessity) substantial coaches drawn by four or even six horses, and such journeys were obviously very costly. For fashionable folk in the towns the sedan-chair was coming into vogue ; one such famous chair lingered on long in Bridgwater, and was well known in the realms of Castle Street. In a word, people lived quieter lives then ; there was less haste, less impatience. It is only fair to say that there was also a keen insight, and a true spirit of observation prevalent then which is found to be sometimes lacking now. Men were weather-wise because they watched the weather. They knew the habits of birds, beasts, and creeping things, because they regarded them at first hand. The house-wife had quaint cures of her own for all sorts of ailments ; she was frequently a herbalist in her small way. The doctoring was rough and ready, and was generally accompanied by the copious letting of blood. These are a few of the symptoms which were evident in country towns and places when the eighteenth century dawned. It may be well to have alluded to them, however briefly, in order better to understand the prevailing type of mind which would, in provincial districts, be available for considering the problems and the future of the nation's life.

The chief problem which arose was. *What was to be done with the Stuart family after Queen Anne's death?* Perhaps among all English towns Bridgwater would feel this question more keenly than any other. For Bridgwater had suffered bitterly under Oliver Cromwell, who had battered down her ancient streets, and had humbled the town to the very dust. Her castle had had to capitulate, her vicar had been bundled neck and crop out of his benefice, and an intruder (albeit a well-meaning man) had been thrust into St. Mary's Church. The siege of 1645 had half ruined the old town, and there were men

living who could remember the whole sad scene. They had not forgotten the tyranny of the proscription of the Book of Common Prayer, with all the pains and penalties attached even to its use in private, and in their memory still remained the painful story of the desecrations committed in their old church. The Stuart Charles the Second, moreover, had brought them peace. Under him their town was repaired, their Church order was restored, their vicar came out of his exile and his bitter poverty, back to his work again. Churchmen who under the Commonwealth scarcely dared to breathe, came out of their thralldom at its abolition, and were free men once more. These things were still remembered by Bridgwater men in Queen Anne's reign, for it was not yet fifty years since Charles came from across the sea to ascend the English throne. No one has ever been quite able to explain how it was that the Stuarts, with all their blunderings and muddles and mistakes — and these were very many — so captivated the hearts of thousands of the English people. Charles the Second was, as a monarch, not a success. He ruled simply by reason of his personal popularity, and because Englishmen were nauseated with so many of the doings of the Commonwealth. James the Second was intensely disliked, as indeed he richly deserved to be. But there was one man whom Somerset, and Bridgwater especially, had never forgotten. This was Monmouth, their darling, their hero. It was only a score or so of years since they had seen him ride out of the town at the head of his troops, eager for battle against the soldiers of King James. His treachery, his flight, his assumed Protestantism — all these things were forgotten now. A glamour hung over his memory ; the glamour due to the brave Somerset lads who followed him. He too was a Stuart, or at least he was believed to have been one. In him still were centred the affectionate memories of many Bridgwater men, even then only in middle age, who had fought at Sedgemoor ; or of children and young men whose fathers had fought there. To the unlettered folk of the Somerset wilds Monmouth was still no traitor, but a hero. He had been executed, it was true, but that was all King James' wickedness. Some even believed that Monmouth still lived, and would come amongst them again. It was enough for them that he represented, or had claimed to represent, the Stuart cause. They believed him to have been the son of Charles the Second and Lucy Walter, and perhaps he

might even have been the lawful son of the King. Now Charles was dead, and James was dead, and Monmouth was dead. But the young Chevalier, James Francis Edward, was living. Surely he would make a better king for English folk than the dour Elector of Hanover. So, at any rate, argued many and many a Bridgwater man between 1702 and 1715, and for years afterwards. It was no wonder that boisterous revelry was held at the Swan or that Jacobite songs were sung gleefully there.

Looking back at that period from the standpoint of our own time, it seems almost impossible to realise that Bridgwater people, and thousands more throughout England, really thought that the Stuarts would return to full power. Yet they did believe this, and many statesmen high in office thought so too. The schemes of the astute Bolingbroke lay all in that direction, though, with the subtlety common to most politicians in that day, he finessed, and strove to keep in with both sides. The Earl of Oxford played the same dangerous game. Francis Atterbury, the eloquent Bishop of Rochester, was far more outspoken, and took no pains to conceal his Jacobite aspirations. He actually sent to Bolingbroke and proposed that when Queen Anne's death should have taken place James Stuart should be proclaimed at Charing Cross as King of England. The Bishop offered to lead the procession in his full canonical dress if Bolingbroke would only yield. But the statesman was more wily than the Bishop ; he demurred, the scheme was too desperate. Meanwhile Anne was contemplating the dismissal of the Earl of Oxford from his office of Lord High Treasurer, and it was in the air that the Duke of Shrewsbury might succeed him. The scene was a thrilling one, and it will bear a brief allusion. Anne was grievously ill, utterly exhausted by the anxieties of her position, and distracted by the worries of the royal succession. Her suspicions of the Earl of Oxford had grown to be extreme. She believed, and believed rightly, that he was playing fast and loose with both Whigs and Tories. She had lost all faith in him, both as a counsellor and as a friend.

Suddenly she made up her mind to give the Minister his dismissal. On July 27th, 1714, she summoned the members of her Council, and pathetically laid before them her perplexities and her distress. The shadow of death lay upon the widowed Queen ; but a few days remained to her of the struggles and sorrows of an earthly kingdom. Yet the old spirit flashed up within her as she told

the Council of Oxford's delinquencies, his neglect of State affairs, his habitual unpunctuality, and his utter lack of reverence and proper respect to her position as a sovereign. He was not unfrequently the worse for immoderate indulgence in wine ; his advice was no longer of value, and, the Queen added, it was no longer sincere. Anne, despite her weakness, grew vehement in her manner as she narrated the story of her indignation, and took no pains to restrain the expression of her displeasure. Oxford was ordered to return his staff of office. The too shrewd Minister, willing to please all and any so as to serve his own ends, was superseded. It is only fair to say that he took his dismissal with real dignity. *Nothing in Oxford's official life became him like the leaving of it.*

Meanwhile the crisis and the hour were rapidly approaching. It was seen that the Queen was sinking, and that but a short time remained to her. A Council was therefore hastily summoned for July 30th, 1714, within three days of its last meeting. One topic alone held the minds of men — the problem of the new dynasty. Was it to be Stuart or Hanoverian? The Queen's hopes were known to all, and they were eagerly fanned by the support of Lady Masham, who had now gained complete ascendancy over her. Bolingbroke secretly shared these views, as all men knew. He hoped to be Oxford's successor, and if he were to be, then he might dare to show his hand. Atterbury was ready for anything. It came to this. Upon that Council's decision lay the future of the House of Stuart. It might be that within two months England would be at war. It might be that the Somerset men would be wanted again, to follow the young Cheval-ier to glory and to a throne.

On Friday morning, July 30th, Queen Anne, worn out by the anxieties of the crisis and all that it meant to her, had an attack of apoplexy, and for a while lost the power of speech. The Council, big with possibilities, met in due course. Its fateful doings must be crowded into the space only of a few lines. Bolingbroke, of course, was there, and it was his expectation that no Privy Councillor would present himself who had not received a formal summons to be present. Yet every councillor possessed the right to come, and it was the exercise of this right which brought about what followed. The Duke of Ormond and some other Jacobite peers came, also the Duke of Shrewsbury, who at that time was Viceroy of Ireland, and was probably one of the ablest and most disinterested statesmen

of the day. He had given great assistance to William of Orange at the time of the revolution, and he was a man who could not be neglected in any national crisis. But the surprise of the hour was yet to come. Present-ly two Whig noblemen, the Duke of Somerset and the Duke of Argyle, presented them-selves. The statesmen present must have been as much astonished as were the guests at Macbeth's feast, when Banquo's ghost appeared. For they were men of immense influence, and that they had come uninvited — in exercise of their constitutional right — showed clearly that something was in the air. The Duke of Somerset was one of the most commanding men in the kingdom. His property, his influence, his steadfast principles, and, it may also be added, his intense consciousness of possessing all these advantages, made him a man of singular importance, and never more than at a moment such as had then arrived. The Duke of Argyle, too, was a man of great weight in his way. Both these noblemen were known to be adherents of the cause of the Hanoverian succession. It was clear to the assembled councillors that no one could tell, as yet, whereunto this development might grow.

Presently the Duke of Shrewsbury rose and thanked the Dukes of Somerset and Argyle for their presence. Thus he thoroughly identified himself with their position. Then, after the two Whig dukes had demanded to see the physicians' reports as to the Queen's health, it was proposed that the Duke of Shrewsbury should be recommended to the Sovereign as Lord High Treasurer. Boling-broke and the Jacobites, aghast, could do nothing. It was clear to them that the party in favour of George the Elector of Hanover was much stronger than they had imagined. The latter had not scrupled to declare themselves. They felt, it was clear, that the Jacobite game was played out. Thus ended one of the most memorable councils that ever met.

The Queen still lived, and a deputation of the peers hastened to seek an interview with their dying Sovereign. The Duke of Shrewsbury was one, and the Queen, when she was told of the decision of the Council as to who should fill the vacant office of High Treasurer, instantly agreed to receive them. As she handed the staff of office to Shrewsbury, she said, in a voice of great sweetness and charm, that she hoped he would use his great position for the good of her people. The Council retired, and they saw her face no

more.

Meanwhile the authorities set vigorously to work. Regiments of troops were placed in and near to London. The fleet was ordered to be in readiness, and every possible provision was made to ensure the peaceful accession of George and the defeat of any attempt which James Stuart might make. In a word, the Whigs had won, and they knew it. They believed — and most people to-day will agree that their judgment was a wise one — that the assured succession to the English throne of the Elector of Hanover, however uninspiring a person he might be personally, would be better for the ultimate good of England than the risk of endless wars and quarrels which would probably arise if the Stuart claimant were to be encouraged. He was also, in addition to other things, a rigorous Roman Catholic, and this — apart from concurrent reasons — sealed his fate with the Privy Council. Thus it was that England, or, let us say, the dominant power in England, declared for the Elector of Hanover. There was absolutely no affection or personal regard in the matter. George could hardly have called forth affection from any one. He was an unimaginative, ignorant, rather dissolute man, but he seemed to be a safer investment for English interests than James Stuart, and so he won the day. On Sunday morning, August 1st, 1714, the poor harassed Queen passed out of this world, and George Louis, son of Ernest Augustus and of Sophia of Hanover, was proclaimed King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, and Defender of the Faith. The Brunswicks had come in ; the Stuarts were a banned and persecuted race. Their rule had come utterly to an end.

Bridgwater people, remembering Sedgemoor and the wild, thrilling days of the Monmouth rising, were sorely put to it to make out what all these developments meant. Perhaps they hoped that the young Chevalier would land on the South Coast, as Monmouth and the Prince of Orange had done. He might aim for London, passing through Somerset on his way. What a welcome they would give him ! What a stirring there would be in the old town ! They had not, indeed, long to wait for news. In the course of the next year came the twofold Stuart rising in the north, one led by the Earl of Mar, and the other by Thomas Forster and the Earl of Derwentwater in Northumberland. The story, brief as it is, is a pathetic one,

and it is a record of disaster from beginning to end. The battle of Sheriffmuir was undecisive, that of Preston went against the Jacobites. There was delay, there was indecision, there was pusillanimity. Many lives were lost, and much suffering was endured. The real cause of failure, however, lay in the powerlessness of James to arouse any sort of inspiration or zeal in his followers. His courage was undoubted, but his reticence, his sedate mien, and his lack of personal influence made him an impossible leader of men. It was on the 22nd of December, 1715, that he landed at Peterhead, in Scotland, and his appearance amongst his followers rather depressed than encouraged them. On a day of ill-omen to the Stuarts, January 30th, in the following year, the retreat from Perth was decided upon. Then came the end of the rising. James had nothing else to do but to return, for he had dispirited his supporters, and had chilled their warm hopes. So, leaving Scotland, he set sail from Montrose, and reached Gravelines on February the 8th. His expedition had not lasted more than six weeks, and it had proved to the Jacobites that as a leader he was past hope. King George might breathe freely, for his rival was harmless. The Jacobites must wait for a better man, which they did, till the coming of the fateful year 1745.

It was a blessing for Bridgwater that James Francis Stuart never appeared in Somerset. His cause had a great following in the south-western counties of England, and it is certain that the Bridgwater people could never have resisted the temptation to follow him. Under such a man their efforts would have resulted in a second Sedgemoor. Nevertheless, they ceased not to pledge the Stuart cause, and to cast a longing look at its fortunes, for many and many a day. Those were the times of James Francis. The time of Charles Edward had yet to come.