Farouk Asserts His Kingship
By CLIFTON DANIEL
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Farouk Asserts His Kingship

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Putting aside the playboy role, he reveals his royal authority in the crisis with Britain.

By CLIFTON DANIEL

A FEW weeks ago King Farouk of Egypt called on some old friends in Cairo, a foreign business man and his wife who have lived there for years. The King remarked that he had not seen much of them recently and the wife replied that they were living a quiet life, dining out occasionally with friends but avoiding affairs and public places. "Well," said the King, "we are all settling down, aren't we?"

His remark seemed to imply increasing maturity, greater contentment and more seriousness of mind. In the past King Farouk's youth and his indiscreet behavior have often led to his being underestimated as a monarch and misunderstood as a man. In the West he has been judged by the standards of the West, the standards of a Christian society, an advanced parliamentary democracy, a European constitutional monarchy — standards that do not necessarily and inevitably apply in his country.

In a recent character sketch The Observer of London said that the easiest way to evaluate King Farouk was to forget the modern conception of the monarchy as "the epitome of domestic virtues and political neutrality" and look back 130 years to the reign of George IV. Then Britain was in transition from an oligarchy of landowners and merchants to a bourgeois democracy, and the crown still influenced the balance of political power.

A rare demonstration of the authority that a monarch can still exercise in such a society was given by King Farouk the week before last when he took the Government of Egypt out of the hands of the country's most powerful politician and its most popular party. The King rose above events—even dominated them—in a way that no other Egyptian could have done. He demonstrated that although he has been ridiculed abroad and called unpopular at home, he still knows how to use his power in a crisis.

With the all-important aid of a loyal army he stopped in one night a deterioration of public order that was beginning to look very much like a revolution.

Except on such occasions the West rarely sees Farouk the man of action King of Egypt, sovereign of Nubia and, under Egyptian law, of the Sudan, behind the facade of Farouk the playboy, king of jesters and sovereign of the casinos of the Côte d'Azur. One has to look closely.

ONE night after the war an American in Cairo went out with a pretty English girl to dine and dance at the grill room in Shepheard's Hotel, that famous caravansary burned out by the Cairo mob two weeks ago.

Every table in the grill room was occupied except the best one on the edge of the dance floor directly in front of the orchestra. It remained empty most of the evening. Finally when the lights were dimmed for the midnight floor show King Farouk and his usual retinue of aides and cronies, all men, occupied the empty places. There was a flurry of interest in the King's arrival but it soon subsided among the habitués, accustomed to seeing him out on the town almost any night. Only a party of Egyptians from the provinces, whispering and peering and craning their necks, seemed excited.

The royal party did not stay long. They had obviously come only to hear the new singer, a French girl. The American and his friend followed the King's entourage out of the room and on their way passed the King, who was standing at the hotel newsstand, idly thumbing through an American picture magazine. When the American returned from the checkroom with his hat he saw his friend strolling down the corridor with the King, whom she knew. She looked over her shoulder and beckoned to her escort to follow.

The King turned, recognized the American, whom he had met once at a private party, and said, "Come along and have a drink." They took a table with all the King's men in a corner of Shepheard's lounge, which in those days looked like a De Mille set for a supercolossal production of "Antony and Cleopatra." Everyone else ordered a brandy or liqueur but the King called for Coca-Cola. The singer was summoned from the grill room to receive the King's congratulations and she mentioned that she had sung on the Egyptian radio. The King not only knew that but he knew all about the state radio network and talked about it for some time. The conversation, which went on in two or three languages, was punctuated by robust guffaws from the King, who kidded his companions, made frequent wisecracks and told jokes, all of them inoffensive.

It got later and later and the King showed no signs of rising. No one violated etiquette by leaving before being dismissed. Finally His Majesty said, "If you want to go, please do. I'm staying up all night. We are going duck shooting at 4 o'clock."

THAT brief encounter illuminated several facets of the King's personality: off duty, he is a democratic, unceremonious monarch, a jolly and convivial man who likes late hours and the company of pretty women but at the same time is a shrewd and sober fellow who knows what is going on in his country.

Because King Farouk, who was a handsome, slender boy of 16 when he succeeded to the throne in 1936, has grown stout and bald, it is sometimes forgotten that he is still young—only 32—and, not surprisingly, inclined to youthful behavior. He is not only young but rich enough to indulge his youthful appetites.

He was at school in England when his father, King Faud, died and his education, in the atmosphere of dignity and social responsibility that surrounds the British monarchy, was cut short. On his return home, according to the stories in Cairo, he was pampered and spoiled by the palace entourage. At the same time he was advised and guided in statecraft by some of the wisest heads in Egypt.

HIS first marriage, to the daughter of an Egyptian statesman, began as a royal idyll but ended in failure. Cairo gossip blamed the King, but there were some who said Queen Farida refused opportunities for a reconciliation. They drifted apart for the same reasons as many other young couples. In the last two years of their marriage they never appeared in public together, and the King by all accounts was disappointed after having three daughters that his wife had not borne a son and heir. He wanted a son to prevent the extinction of his dynasty, his heir being a septugenarian bachelor cousin, Prince Mohammed Ali.

When a son, Prince Ahmed Faud, was born recently to his 17-year-old second wife, Narriman Sadek, the ex-Queen sent a message congratulating him on attaining his "heart's desire."

Queen Farida was a pretty and popular girl and after the divorce there were small public demonstrations for her. To outsiders it may have seemed that she was summarily dismissed. She was divorced, without a hearing, by royal decree. To Moslems the procedure was routine and correct, for Moslem law al- *(Continued on Page 31)*



Farouk—"Although ridiculed abroad, he knows how to use his power in a critical time."

CLIFTON DANIEL, Times foreign correspondent, covered Egypt for several years.

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King Farouk confers with Egyptian army officers at Cairo.

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lows a husband to dispense with a wife by a simple declaration of divorce. The same law requires the husband to provide generously for his divorced wife, and King Farouk did so.

Legally speaking, he could have taken another wife or two or three without divorcing the first one, as older Moslem monarchs, such as King Ibn Saud and the late King Abdullah, have done. However, Egyptian society has become so Westernized that monogamy is now the accepted rule among the urban upper classes.

KING FAROUK'S second marriage was reminiscent of the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba. His wife already was engaged to a young Egyptian diplomatic official when, according to the Cairo stories, she was first seen in a jewelry store by the King.

The King's choice scandalized the outside world and embarrassed Egyptians abroad. But because of the enforced discretion of the Egyptian press it was reported without sensational details in the Cairo newspapers and probably had less of an effect among the Egyptian masses than Westerners would suppose. In any case, it did not shake the throne like the romance of King Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson.

On balance the King's divorce and remarriage may even have a beneficial effect on his reign. The birth of a Crown Prince was joyously received in Egypt and it is said that King Farouk, who has many times been quoted as remarking that there would soon be only five kings in the world —the King of England and the four kings in a pack of cards —now takes more interest in preserving and strengthening the royal heritage that some day will pass to his son.

The King goes out less than before and is happier at home with his wife, who is young and robustly gay, but, according to courtiers, is shrewd and perceptive beyond her years.

When King Farouk appeared in Europe on his honeymoon last summer he was something of an anachronism in the post-war world — an Oriental potentate still in possession of his crown and his riches. (In actual fact, the King is not Oriental by ancestry. The founder of his dynasty, Mohammed Ali the Great, was an Albanian soldier in the Turkish service in the post-Napoleonic era.)

Arriving in a huge yacht, driving about in a fleet of powerful cars, taking whole floors in de luxe hotels, and staking thousands on the turn of a card, he astounded Europeans whom poverty had made prudent.

Egyptians, in so far as they knew of the king's lavish extravagance, were less astonished. They live in a land where the income tax is negligible, riches are no embarrassment, and a desire to share the wealth is not a national characteristic. The rich are richer and the poor are poorer than in most other places in the world. Great displays of wealth are commonplace and the poor, hoping like Lazarus for crumbs from the rich man's table, almost seem to enjoy them.

ALTHOUGH some Egyptians thought the King's conduct was giving Egypt a bad name abroad, many were resentful of the lampooning in Western newspapers and those who were pro-British thought the London newspapers were unwisely making an enemy of the King, who reportedly read all that was printed about him in the press. An Egyptian army officer who won a swimming race across the English Channel sponsored by a London newspaper declined the thousand-pound prize because

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of slurs on the King in the British press.

Last week references to the King suddenly became complimentary. Words such as adroit, skillful and shrewd were used in London to describe his action in removing Mustafa el Nahas Pasha from the Premiership and installing Ali Maher Pasha in his place. It had been discovered again that King Farouk not only had the greatest personal power in Egypt but knew how to use it in an emergency.

THE King of Egypt is no political neuter as are the constitutional monarchs of Europe. The Egyptian Constitution was deliberately designed to put more authority in the King's hands and King Farouk's father constantly fought to preserve the royal prerogatives.

King Farouk can appoint or dismiss Prime Ministers without reference to Parliament or the electorate, as he did last week. He can even legislate by royal decree although his decrees must be approved by Parliament.

He has his own royal cabinet paralleling the council of ministers with separate departments for its various functions. The chief of the royal Cabinet which exercises great political influence is appointed without reference to the Government and operates independently.

From the outside it is difficult to judge how much his advisers influence the King or how much he commands them. Some say that the proportion of influence is 50 to 75 per cent in the King's favor. It is certain that he is impulsive, strong-willed and expects to be obeyed. Such is the King's power that many Westerners believe he could transform Egypt if he would personally undertake to eradicate corruption, attack the problems of economic and social reform and insist upon higher taxes on the rich. In the process he might regain such popularity as he has lost in recent years.

KING FAROUK, who ceremoniously goes to public prayers every Friday at a different mosque, is conspicuous in his observance of the Moslem injunction upon the rich to be charitable. Tens of thousands of his subjects received gifts and free meals on the occasion of his son's birth.

But he cannot be said to have made any mark as a social reformer. During his reign there has been a slow accretion of social legislation, but it has never been adequate to the vast poverty, disease and distress of the masses.

Once, about five years ago, the King did show his concern by a startling intervention in politics. He appeared in person before the Cabinet and ordered a vigorous attack on social evils. The entire press acclaimed his action, but, as usual in Egypt, the reform

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program bogged down in disinterest, inefficiency and selfishness.

The Wafd party in its two years in office instituted the beginnings of social insurance, extended educational opportunities, increased taxes and made some land reforms, but its record was marred, as before, by nepotism and corruption.

In King Farouk's time the Egyptian Government has been preoccupied with two problems that are not related to the underlying social ills of Egypt, although they have often been used as an excuse for inaction in the social sphere.

Those problems are the rivalry between the Wafd party on the one hand and the royal palace and the lesser parties on the other and the struggle to evict the British from their last foothold in Egypt, the military zone along the Suez Canal.

In February, 1942, the two problems merged when the British Ambassador, Sir Miles Lampson, now Lord Killearn, supported by tanks, served an ultimatum on the young King. He demanded the appointment of Nahas Pasha, the Wafd leader, as Premier. With the Axis armies almost at the gates of Alexandria, the Ambassador feared that the weak anti-Wafd Government could not control the Egyptian masses.

BY one of the ironies of history it was a Wafd Government that allowed the mob to get out of hand last week and it was King Farouk who came to the rescue of British interests.

They say in Cairo that the King will never forget the humiliation of having British guns trained on his palace in 1942. They hope here that he also will not forget Egypt's vulnerability and her need for a defensive alliance with the West.

In spite of everything Britain relies more on the King than on any other man in Egypt.

Although the King has his grievances against Britain, is not lacking in Egyptian national spirit and is presumably ambitious to extend his kingdom by incorporating the Sudan, he is not blindly anti-British or anti-Western. He was happy in his brief stay in England, cycling through the countryside and visiting British institutions. He has many British friends and obviously respects the British monarchy

Upon the death of King George VI he ordered two weeks' court mourning in Egypt, cancelled the celebrations planned for his thirty-second birthday, and deputed his cousin Prince Abdel Moneim, third in succession to the Egyptian throne, to represent him at the King's funeral.

DURING the war the King also got to know many Americans of his own age, and with a minimum of formality joined in their social life in Cairo He still sees some of them.

Conversely, he has every reason—political, personal and religious — to be anti-Communist. He has seen the specter of social revolution in the square of Abdin Palace, but he may still be shortsighted about the alliance of the Soviet Army in the Middle East.

He has been quoted as remarking in the past year or two that Egypt could not fight on two fronts at once. One front, of course, was against the British. The other, as he saw it, was not the Soviet Union but Israel.

The failure of the British to get a new agreement with Egypt for joint defense of the Middle East has been due to their inability to make the Egyptians see that there is any threat beyond the British camps along the Suez Canal and Israeli guns north of Gaza. However, if anyone in Egypt can be made to see, it is more likely to be the man on the eminence of the throne rather than those in the cockpit of party politics.

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