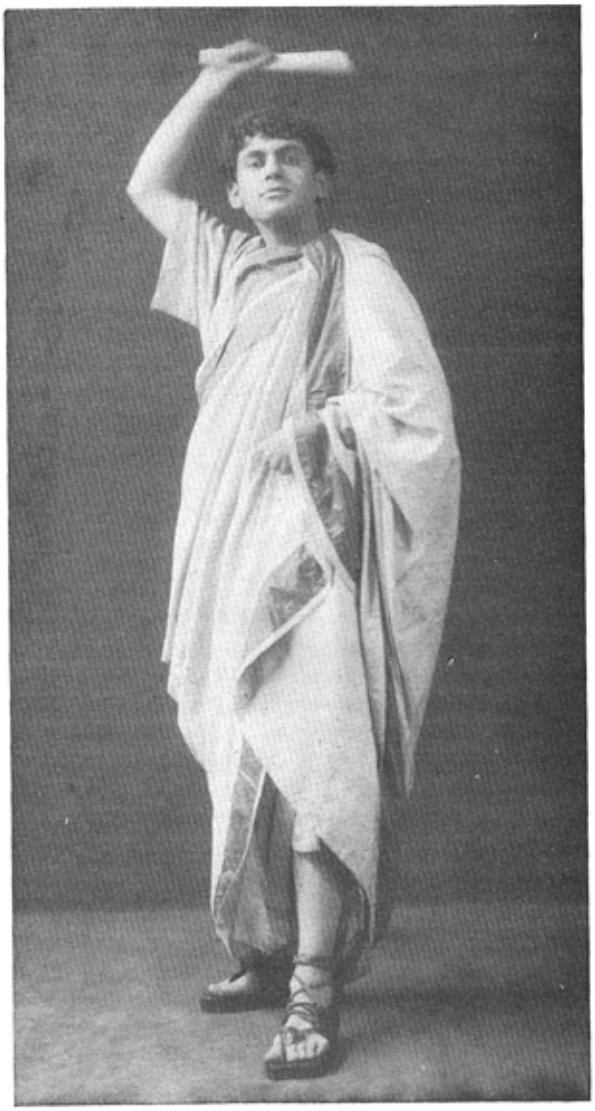
Philip Guedalla Defends the Duke

Philip Guedalla – historian, wit and failed Liberal politician – became the Duke of Windsor's most trusted supporter in England. He conceived a brilliant public defence of Edward; but it came too late . . .

Michael Bloch

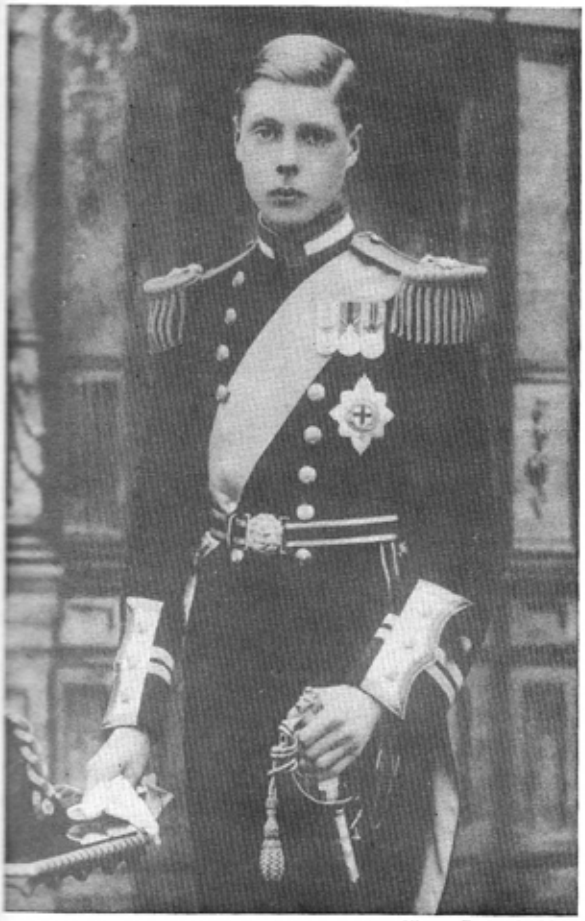


By courtesy of the author

PHILIP GUEDALLA *at Oxford in the role of Mark Antony in 'Julius Caesar', 1911*

NOW THAT LADY Donaldson's impressive but unsympathetic life of Edward VIII, so sensationally adapted for television, has somehow come to be regarded as a semi-official work and the last word upon the subject, it is only with effort that one recalls that other historians (apart, of course, from the Duke and Duchess as autobiographers) have written books presenting a strong defence case for Edward or giving a rather different view of the Abdication. Lady Donaldson does not give these books a great deal of attention in her pages. To the one which was most widely read, Compton Mackenzie's *Windsor Tapestry*, she devotes half a paragraph, succinctly dismissing it as 'almost unreadable'. She cannot do the same with Lord Beaverbrook's *Abdication of Edward VIII*, for that was written by a man in the thick of the crisis; but she hints – with some justification – that the main aim of that piece was to pay off old scores. But one book she does not mention at all is Philip Guedalla's *The Hundredth Year*. She can hardly be blamed, for the author – a legend in his day – is not much remembered now; and the book – which had the ominous bad fortune to be due to appear on September 4th, 1939, and finally to be published on the last day of Dunkirk – was not much read. Yet it is a pity, for the work makes a number of observations others fail to make; and the story of how it came to be written – a story in which Edward himself played a part – tells a great deal both about the man who wrote it and the man it was intended to serve.

One must begin (though there would have been no need thirty years ago) by saying something about Philip Guedalla (1889-1944). He was one of the great failed hopes of the Liberal Party, one of the most delightful men in London Society, and one of the most popular historical writers between the wars. Born into an old Spanish-Jewish family which had settled in England in the eighteenth century, and having a background and personality which reminds one in more than one way of Disraeli, he was edu-



History Today Archives

THE PRINCE OF WALES *was at Oxford two years later*

cated at Rugby, where he was Head of School the year after Rupert Brooke left. From there he went to Balliol, then at the height of its reputation, where he took a double first in classics and history. With his exuberant, gregarious personality, his exotic, Mediterranean good looks, and his remarkable brilliance in speech, he took university society by storm and became (as Lord Birkenhead put it) 'the best-known man in all Oxford'. His impact was most spectacularly felt at the Union, where, together with the slightly older and rival undergraduate Ronald Knox, he perfected a special style of epigrammatic speaking which every Oxonian until 1939 was to try and imitate. The style has gone, but many of his epigrams are still remembered, such as 'any stigma to beat a dogma' and 'a little college is a dangerous thing'. When he went down in 1912 (just missing the Prince of Wales, who came up the following term and befriended some of the younger men Guedalla had known such as Walter Monckton and Eugen Millington-Drake) he quite naturally went to the Bar, where the Attorney-General, Sir Rufus Isaacs, saw him installed in good chambers and, like everyone else, predicted for him a brilliant career.

But then came war. Guedalla, with a not very strong heart and the only son of a widow without private means, did not fight: which was something people did not lightly forgive. It was he, in fact, who uttered the unforgivable remark 'I, Sir, am the Civilisation they are fighting for!', which was later wrongly attributed, no doubt to its author's relief, to Lytton Strachey. He worked hard as a legal adviser to the Ministry of Munitions; but after 1918, when all the briefs were gratefully given to returning heroes such as Walter Monckton, his practice began to collapse. In the early twenties, encouraged by Max Beerbohm, he quitted the law altogether to devote himself to writing. He had already acquired a literary reputation with a weekly essay for the *New Statesman*; and in 1919 he had obtained a measure of financial security by his marriage to a beautiful society heiress. In 1922 he exploded into the reviews with his first, and perhaps best, historical biography, *The Second Empire*, a work remarkable for its irony and impressionism. *Palmerston* followed in 1926, and *The Duke*, his study of Wellington, for which he is perhaps best remembered, in 1931.

It is not very easy to read Guedalla's books today. They were written in a then fashionable allusive and atmospheric style, and directed towards a highly and classically educated upper middle class. As Lady Longford has written in an otherwise praising essay on *The Duke*, the language tends to strike ordinary readers now as 'poetic, elitist, precious and obscure'. Even then the main criticism of his work was that it was 'overwritten', that its very dazzle somehow blinded one to the history, which was in fact based on considerable research. Still, it cannot be disputed that Guedalla's books, now ignored, commanded the most sensational popularity in the twenties and thirties, and also won him the friendship of numerous eminent literary men (outside the Bloomsbury coterie, against which he conducted a fierce and unremitting war). H. G. Wells, Max Beerbohm, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, John Drinkwater, David Low, Rebecca West, Pamela Frankau, Charles Morgan, Ronald Fraser, Hilaire Belloc, Edmund Gosse, Ronald Storrs . . . these and many others delighted in his company and regularly graced the dinner table of the Guedallas' house in Hyde Park Street, which was famous for its collection of Second Empire curios and Beerbohm caricatures. He also (as Yeats said of Wilde) talked

By courtesy of the author

Caricature of Guedalla for Vanity Fair's *'Hall of Fame', by Aubrey Hammond, September, 1923*

exactly as he wrote and 'spoke perfect sentences', being widely considered the finest public speaker of the inter-war years.

But merely being delightful and writing well cannot satisfy a man of such powers and ambition, and Guedalla longed for a successful public career. In his Oxford days it had seemed that quick election to Parliament was inevitable and he would go straight to the top; men seriously thought of him as a future Prime Minister or Lord Chancellor. But here Guedalla's luck stopped. In spite of every advantage – brilliance in speech, quickness of mind, power of work – he was dogged by miscalculation and misfortune. He never managed to shake off his Edwardian enthusiasm for the Asquithian Liberals, which doomed him from the start. It was not the last forlorn cause to which – with a mixture of loyalty and monomania – he was to attach himself. His failure at the Bar did not help; his lack of a war record was fatal; and he developed an incurable habit of speaking above the heads of common audiences. In the late twenties it seemed for a moment that his hour had arrived. In 1926 Lloyd George succeeded Asquith as leader of a united Liberal Party, and earmarked the dynamic young Guedalla for the very highest promotion in the new Liberal revival. He was one of the authors of the great Liberal industrial programme known as 'The Yellow Book', and was given the most traditionally Liberal seat in Manchester to contest. But the new dawn somehow failed to materialize; in May 1929 barely sixty members followed Lloyd George back to Westminster; and Guedalla ignominiously lost his election to Baldwin's Solicitor-General.

He was now forty and rather disillusioned; and while he did not give up hope, and drifted to yet another constituency which was to remain Liberal until he had the misfortune to contest it, he turned his attention from parliamentary politics and busied himself in London social life and his literary *tour de force* on Wellington. But there were other paths to public life apart from that which led through the House of Commons; and when, in 1931, there came to him an extraordinary proposal which offered him such a one, he hastened to follow it.

In March 1931 the Prince of Wales visited Argentina. Though Lady Donaldson makes no reference to it, it was in fact a most important visit. Outside the Empire, nowhere were British commercial interests so strong or British society so influential as in Argentina. Most of the Argentine railways and trade banks were owned by British companies. Britain relied for beef and other commodities upon Argentina. Anglo-Argentine society – headed by the proconsular dynasties of the Davidsons and Lawson Johnsons with their fortunes and peerages – was extensive and important. But by 1931 the picture was changing fast. Since the War nationals of other states, notably Germany, France and Italy, had settled in the country and acquired a stake there. These states were able to promote their interests and popularize their civilisations by means of efficient 'overseas cultural propaganda' machines which Britain simply did not possess. At the same time, there was growing resentment at the wealth, influence and exclusiveness of the British community there. It was to halt the decline of British paramountcy, stimulate flagging commerce and restore pro-British feeling – to conduct a massive public relations exercise abroad when things were grim at home – that the Prince went to Argentina. His visit was an immense success.

During his few private moments on the tour Edward had done his best to avoid the company of the British Ambassador and avail himself of the more congenial company of the Counsellor at the Embassy. This was the legendary Eugen Millington-Drake, later to achieve fame as the architect of 'the Battle of the River Plate'. With his incredible good looks, reputation for being rather strange, and near-insane enthusiasm for any idea which took hold of him, Millington-Drake was the very model of a romantic modern diplomatist. The

Prince suggested that, in the lamentable absence of a proper public relations organization, something ought to be done to follow up the anglophile mood he had engendered. An idea struck like a match in the mind of Millington-Drake. C.U.B.A. – the *Club Universitario de Buenos Aires* – had long been trying to organize some major excursion to England. Why not now arrange for a party of Oxbridge undergraduates to visit Argentina, and for a C.U.B.A. group to return to be entertained by them? The idea sounds commonplace now but was an unusual inspiration then. But its success might depend upon a distinguished and attractive man to lead the expedition; and who could be found?

The answer was obvious – Guedalla! Millington-Drake had known him at Oxford, and been as charmed as anyone; Edward had met him at a house party of the Gladstones at Hawarden in 1928, and been immensely entertained by him. He had a reputation; he was charming; and was there not something 'Iberian' about him, apart from the name? He certainly had rather the air of a Spanish don, with his elegant, dandified manner and dress, the eagle-like head on a short neck, the jet-black hair and sallow, oriental face, the dark eyes flashing hypnotically under bushy, arching brows. Millington-Drake at once set about contacting him with a barrage of his notoriously long telegrams. Guedalla was delighted. He liked the company of young men; and fulfilling this royal command would be a welcome break from his participation in the collapse of the Liberal Party. The fact that he spoke no Spanish and knew nothing of South America hardly seemed to matter; and he romantically looked forward to the trip as 'a genuflection to my origins'. And so at the end of July 1931 – after a somewhat overwhelming week of royal receptions – the Guedallas and eight undergraduates set out for South America in a blaze of publicity. Their trip could hardly have been more successful. Guedalla himself, who gave the impression of a sort of Anglo-Argentine in reverse, was greeted with uproarious delight; but what caught the Argentine imagination utterly was the innocence and enthusiasm of the young men. They were tremendously received everywhere (even by the Dictator Uriburu), plunged into an unfamiliar world of tennis parties and night clubs, beseiged by reporters, and adored quite as much as the Prince. Guedalla later wrote an amusing book about the expedition, *Argentine Tango*, in which he claimed they had dispelled the English notion of South America as 'a complicated libretto of operatic politics diversified by tropical diseases and exciting lepidoptera'.

The period they had been away coincided exactly with the caretaker National Government at home, when, as Guedalla put it, 'Ramsay Macdonald became his own successor and so saved England from himself'. He dashed overland from Lisbon to fight the 'Doctor's Mandate' Election – and lost the last Liberal seat in Lancashire. But he had other interests now. For the Prince, after absorbing his Argentine experiences, had indulged in some of the plain-speaking which caused so many eyebrows to rise before he came to the throne. He told consternated northern businessmen they would have to do better to be competitive abroad; and went on to tell the Foreign Office and Board of Trade that the lack of organized public relations abroad was appalling. Some men, such as Sir Percy Lorraine, the British Ambassador in Ankara, entirely agreed; but the traditional British dislike of self-advertisement prevailed and nothing was at this stage done. Guedalla now took the initiative. If the Prince could not persuade the authorities to sanction an official body, then *he* would set up an unofficial one under the Prince's patronage. And so, in 1932, the *Ibero-American Institute of Great Britain* came into being. Edward was the titular head, Guedalla the Director, Millington-Drake acted as the man on the spot, and the Anglo-Argentine magnates rallied round with the money. The Institute's main achievement was the foundation of the Prince of Wales' Scholarships which sent two Argentine post-graduates annually to Oxford. It also improved the teaching of English in the continent through the creation of anglophile societies such as the Brazilian *Cultura Inglesa*, and sent a brace of British lecturers every year to South America: Guedalla went himself in 1933, and again in 1934 with Compton Mackenzie.

All this may not seem very significant for students of Edward VIII; but it is important in at least one perspective. A great deal has recently been hinted about the supposed secret sympathies of the Duke of Windsor with Britain's enemies. Indeed, Lady Donaldson, who does not mention Edward and Latin America, devotes two-fifths of her account of the reign of Edward before the Abdication Crisis to a chapter entitled *The King and Nazi Germany*. What is now rarely remembered and almost forgotten is that, when in 1933 Goebbels mobilized German settlers everywhere in the campaign to glorify Nazism, the only organized 'cultural relations' Britain had anywhere (it seems amazing, but it is true) were those provided by the Travel Association (also patronized by the Prince) and Guedalla's Ibero-American Institute. This leads one to ask to what

Keystone Press

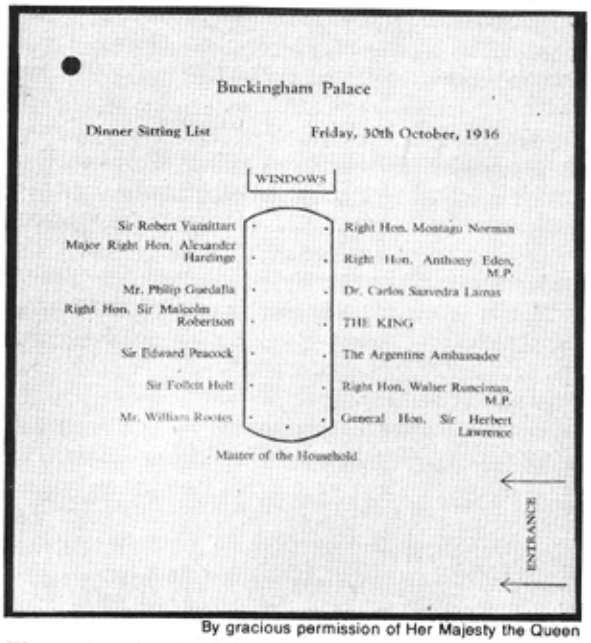
EUGEN MILLINGTON-DRAKE, *Chief Representative of the British Council in Buenos Aires, and the Prince's and Guedalla's man in Argentina*

extent Edward really took an interest in their activities. The answer was given in 1935 after the Foreign Office – reluctantly and with a derisory annual grant of £3,000 – was at last persuaded to support a *British Council for Relations with Other Countries*. Inaugurating the new association on July 2nd, Edward – so far as he was allowed to do so – spoke his mind. He began by commenting wryly that 'of all the Great Powers this country is the last in the field of setting up a proper organization to spread a knowledge and appreciation of its language, literature, art, science and education'. He attacked 'the insularity which led us . . . to believe that the foreigner would come to us in any event'. Such a debacle as the sudden collapse of British social influence in Egypt was 'an outstanding example of what we have lost by our lack of appreciation of the importance of an educational philosophy'. That a disaster like this could have been avoided was proved by the fact that it *had* been avoided in another portion of the globe by the Ibero-American Institute, which was 'a direct outcome of my last visit to South America. To my mind the work it has been doing corresponds exactly to that which we wish to do all over the world.' In fact almost the only part of the world in which the British Council had working operations to begin with was South America, as a result of the fact that Guedalla, at the Prince's request, put the Institute at the service of the new organization.

Through the Institute and later the Council Guedalla had about a dozen private interviews a year with Edward between 1931 and 1936. It would be too much to say that they became friends (in so far as Edward was later able to say he had ever really had any). Guedalla's social circle was more that of the Athanaeum than the Embassy Club – though he was no prude. But they came to know each other well and enjoy and feel quite at ease in each other's company. One of the 1931 undergraduates recalls their amazement at Guedalla's familiar and unconstrained manner when he presented them to the Prince at York House, and in particular how he calmly began to smoke his pipe without leave. Like all princes, Edward dreaded being bored, and whether conversation was for business or pleasure, Guedalla was always entertaining. He also needed at times to be reassured, and Guedalla knew how to be reassuring. Guedalla for his part (though he was no sycophant, and had risked incurring the royal displeasure of George V in 1933 by his publication of the correspondence of Gladstone and Queen Victoria) genuinely admired the Prince, with whom he shared certain qualities: an outspoken impatience with cant, an exuberant sense of adolescence in middle age. He also saw his association with the heir to the throne as something which compensated him for his failure in politics. It was a relationship destined to become much closer later on, when both men looked back in sadness and anger upon lives which were long tales of unfulfilled expectation.

When Edward succeeded in January 1936, Guedalla greeted the new reign with jubilant enthusiasm. As an executant of the King's views on overseas relations he might well have expected to become head of the British Council, the chair of which was due to fall vacant that year. (It was in fact taken by Baldwin's old Education minister, Lord Eustance Percy – but that was understood to be a very temporary appointment.) But above all, the modern, forty-one-year-old monarch was a man after his own heart and an almost miraculous relief from the tired, slow, incompetent old men who were governing Britain when he came to the throne. When Ramsay Muir wrote that 'the National Government in 1936 is the worst, the weakest, the most timorous and the most incompetent since the days of Lord North' he was expressing what much of Britain felt. Afterwards, it might seem to some that cautious, conservative old age had simply refused to tolerate casual, forthright modernism of forty-one.

It is not the place here to talk about the events of the Abdication, about which, as Lady Donaldson would naively have us believe, 'everything is known'. But there was one interesting event which



Buckingham Palace

Dinner Sitting List — Friday, 30th October, 1936

WINDOWS

Sir Robert Vansittart	Right Hon. Montagu Norman
Major Right Hon. Alexander Hardinge	Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.P.
Mr. Philip Guedalla	Dr. Carlos Saavedra Lamas
Right Hon. Sir Malcolm Robertson	THE KING
Sir Edward Peacock	The Argentine Ambassador
Sir Follett Holt	Right Hon. Walter Runciman, M.P.
Mr. William Rootes	General Hon. Sir Herbert Lawrence

Master of the Household

ENTRANCE

By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen

The seating plan for Edward VIII's only official dinner at Buckingham Palace. Guedalla is placed opposite the guest of honour and to the King's right

Guedalla witnessed and which, if 'known', is hardly ever mentioned. On the evening of Friday, October 30th – three days after Mrs Simpson's decree *nisi* and a few hours after Ribbentrop had been officially received as German Ambassador – Edward presided over the first and last official dinner of his reign at Buckingham Palace. The guest of honour was Dr Carlos Saavedra Lamas, the remarkable Argentine Foreign Minister, who was briefly stopping in London *en route* from Geneva to Buenos Aires to discuss Anglo-Argentine trade. Guedalla, among the eleven other guests, left a private account of the occasion. Edward exerted to the full his immense charm. He was determined that 'a stiff ceremonial' should become 'an enjoyable men's party'. Throughout dinner he talked to Lamas in Spanish; and when a piper came in afterwards he turned to Lamas with boyish delight exclaiming 'mi composición!' The business of the evening he knew how to handle. 'The King was sitting with his guest from Argentina and signalled one or two of them to join the little group. There was a long session with the Governor of the Bank . . . In the big drawing room their host marshalled his little party and brought each one of them to bear upon the chief guest . . .' Then they went into the Picture Gallery. Within a month there was a new Anglo-Argentine Treaty giving Argentina the same trade preference as the dominions. It was a considerable diplomatic triumph. 'But though such parties may be successful, their success is only purchased by unremitting effort on the host's part . . . The King's effort was most arduous, as the whole business of entertainment rested on a host . . . He was still talking in the picture gallery, until a final round of the little circle brought him to the door and they saw the last of him – it was for some of them, though they did not know it, the last sight of him . . .'

Though Guedalla, like most informed people, knew of 'the King's matter', and though he had at least one informant at Court (Lady Dawson of Penn, the wife of the Royal Physician), the Abdication came to him, as to almost everybody, as a sudden and entirely unexpected shock. Indeed, by the time he learnt what was happening the whole affair was practically a *fait accompli*, and there was nothing for him to do save give what help he could to Churchill in his vain efforts to secure 'time and patience'. As he wrote after Churchill had been shouted down in the House on December 7th: 'I have never felt so much respect for anyone as for you and for the stand you have made in the past week.' Perhaps his main contribution in the Crisis was a line in an article he wrote for the pro-King *News Chronicle*, which became for a few days a sort of catch-phrase among the King's supporters: 'It is hard to think of any step he might take by which his public usefulness could be diminished.' Taking the chair at the dinner of the Cinematograph Association on December 8th, he gave the toast, 'May we long drink to the health of King Edward', to what *The Times* described as 'loud and prolonged cheering'. But three days later Edward abdicated and left England, taking with him as travel reading Guedalla's recently published history book *The Hundred Years*.

And so, as Guedalla put it, a land 'which had once changed its faith in order that a king might marry, had now changed a king in order to preserve its faith'.

* * *

The Abdication came to Guedalla as a shattering blow. All hope of a public career now vanished: like Churchill, he had become one of the discredited men who had threatened a constitutional nightmare for the Government. And the departure of Edward he saw not so much as Abdication as Deposition. Baldwin's Government, as he viewed it, had been catastrophically inert in their foreign policy and reluctance to re-arm: but they had summoned vast energies to rid themselves of this ruler whose youth, vitality and charisma was in such embarrassing contrast to their own. 'The King was handled with a

firmer touch than the King's enemies', wrote Guedalla in his life of Churchill. What sickened him more than anything was that Baldwin, who had fallen to a nadir of unpopularity during the reign, somehow contrived to come out of the affair as a hero. 'Now that the disturbance has subsided,' he wrote to a friend in February 1937, 'the sediment has settled at the top.' The idea of a Baldwin-led conspiracy against Edward may seem fanciful now, and is, indeed, derided by Lady Donaldson. But it is consonant with the explanation Edward himself later put forward; and it is interesting to see how many people, including such men 'in the know' as Beaverbrook, believed in it then. Edmund Blunden summed up a widespread mood in his stanza:

> . . . But these have triumphed. What are these?
> Dogmas, distortions, enmities,
> Old rumour with her modern tricks,
> Slow apprehensive politics . . .

In her book, Lady Donaldson states that the 'some sort of following of the Duke's in England' in which foreigners believe was 'in fact non-existent'. This is not quite true. There *was* a group of people – mostly from the unofficial world of letters, Society, journalism and the universities, but including a significant group of active Liberals who had pleaded with Sinclair to form a 'King's Government' – who, while showing every outward loyalty to the new reign, never really accepted the fact of the Abdication. As Sir Compton Mackenzie, a sometime secret agent, explains in his memoirs, men who were friendly with or sympathetic towards the Duke of Windsor (such as Mackenzie himself) were under the close surveillance of M.1.5 and had their correspondence with him intercepted. It is not intended to give a list of this 'following' here, merely to point out that Guedalla – who referred to the Duke as 'H. M.', and quietly left London before the Coronation – was clearly of it. Of course, there was never any question of 'restoring' Edward. But between 1937 and 1940 his supporters did aim to achieve four things: to protect his reputation; to stimulate public sympathy for him; to mitigate the indignities to which he (and they) felt he was being submitted; and above all, to enable him to return home with his consort in some decent capacity. In the early months of 1937 Guedalla was one of an informal committee which met at the Marlborough Club under the aegis of Sir Godfrey Thomas, ostensibly to discuss the means of countering press attacks on the Duke; and there was talk of their opening a London office for him. But all the efforts of the supporters seemed to hang on the co-operation of one man: a forty-six-year-old barrister knighted that year named Walter Monckton.

Guedalla defends Edward VIII in 'The News Chronicle', in the last week of the Abdication Crisis

News Chronicle

We Must Have The Facts

THE KING AS A MAN

By Philip Guedalla

THE country is anxious. Ordinary men are searching newspapers and informing total strangers of their opinions upon a matter which vitally concerns them all.

"He shows a marked distaste for walking on red carpets"

Dogberry At Play

Knights

From My Postbag

One may pause to look at this extraordinary character. At Oxford before 1914 he had been a hero among the 'hearties'. Guedalla, two years his senior at Balliol, had recognised his social and intellectual talents and 'promoted' him for the Union; the Prince of Wales, two years his junior, had drafted him into a small circle of university sporting friends. After a gallant war career he had achieved rapid and astonishing success at the Bar – largely at the expense of the unfavoured such as Guedalla who had stayed in London during the fighting. He certainly possessed remarkable gifts, not least of them infinite discretion and tact. In the autumn of 1936 he was the man the King chose to conduct his relations with Baldwin and the Government; and after the Abdication he continued to be the link between the Duke of Windsor and the powers that be, for no-one else commanded both the friendship of the Duke and the trust of the Government and Court.

Monckton appeared to execute his role with marvellous tact and skill. But was his task not in fact impossible? For the Court and Government – partly because of the personality of King George VI, partly to remove the nightmare of the Abdication from the national consciousness, partly for reasons one does not talk of yet – had a ruthless and straightforward policy with regard to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor: to keep them as far away as possible and act as if they did not exist. In these circumstances, where did Monckton's loyalties (or impartialities) lie? Was he to be the official instrument whereby the Windsors were to be effaced? Or the friend who might soften the blows? Was he truly the faithful adviser of Edward in his problems with the British Government? Or was he rather the Government's special adviser in their 'Edward problem'?

But it was only with war that this dilemma would become serious; in 1937 Monckton was the Duke's most trusted friend and the man upon whom his supporters most relied. Guedalla (an angry man now in any case) had uncertain feelings about his old university friend. But it was a time to bury animosities; and in the autumn of 1937 Guedalla outlined to Monckton a plan to help the Duke. Monckton duly reported it to Edward, who wrote to Guedalla on November 9th: 'When Walter Monckton was here he showed me your letter . . . I suggest that you come over to see me. The matter which you have in mind, and which I may add is in my mind also, can only be discussed verbally. The Duchess of Windsor and I have given the idea a great deal of thought, and we shall be glad to receive you any day convenient to yourself.'

So it was that Guedalla accompanied Monckton to Paris to see the Duke on November 15th. That evening they dined with the Windsors at their rented villa at Versailles. Guedalla wrote a private memoir of the occasion in almost Jacobite terms:

> When he came into the room I was amazed to see how slender and perfect his figure is and how well he holds himself. He seemed a beautifully executed model of a highland chief . . . He is as blond as ever, but going a little thin on top. His face wizened but young. When he looks at one with his large pale eyes, and it is such a direct scrutinising look, something turns over inside one. His voice is less metallic than one is accustomed to hearing it in broadcasts. It seems to soften when he says darling to her . . . He does not like Germany as such to be mentioned adversely. One feels that he has ties of family hard to break . . . He is bitter about the betrayal of those he made, and about the petty little pin pricks to which he is constantly subjected. His greeting and farewell are those of a particularly charming and solicitous host – he comes down into the hall with his guests – one's last sight is of his kilt outlined against the light in the hall.

The next day Guedalla outlined his scheme before the Duke. The ultimate aim was to find Edward an appropriate role in England and the Empire; and Guedalla was determined to help towards this through the British Council (now becoming powerful under the masterful Lord Lloyd, with Guedalla as the second most important man). But first sympathetic public interest in the Duke and Duchess had to be stimulated; and here Guedalla's pen might help a good deal. In 1936 his book *The Hundred Years* – an impressionist survey of world events from Queen Victoria's accession to King George V's death with liberal themes – had been a best seller on both sides of the Atlantic and wielded some effect on public opinion. He now proposed a sequel, *The Hundredth Year*, dealing with the events of 1936 with the main focus on Edward's reign and abdication. The method would have the advantage of portraying Edward VIII as the victim of a particularly harsh and illogical moment of history – and of a government which tackled none of its international problems; and might not millions read it who had read the other book, and be similarly affected by its argument and prose? The Duke, himself a fan of Guedalla's writings, was delighted with the idea, and offered to supply any private information. 'We are anxious that you should know how much we appreciate your desire to render us service', he wrote, 'and we entirely agree that your method . . . is the best way of doing so.'

Guedalla did not begin the book at once, for he had arranged to spend the winter and spring of

1937-8 lecturing in the United States. He arrived there to find the Windsors everywhere attacked in the press on account of their visit to Germany in September: and he defended them in the popular weeklies in articles with titles like 'Windsor no Fascist'. He argued: this was the patriot Prince who had fought in the trenches; family ties were not to be confused with ideological preferences; if he had a streak of the demagogue, so had such freedom-lovers as Lloyd George and F. D. Roosevelt. And who had allowed the Hitler menace to become such a nightmare? The pusillanimous national Government in Britain – the same men who had sought Abdication in 1936. Edward's sole political role had been to give Britain her only defence against Nazi propaganda: organized cultural relations overseas. It was evidence at least of the passion with which Guedalla – a Jew who was one of the leaders of the campaign of British intellectuals against fascism – believed in Edward and had become the ex-King's man.

Guedalla wrote *The Hundredth Year* between the summers of 1938 and 1939; and every couple of months he would go over to Paris for a week of talk with the Duke. Their extraordinary (though discreet) correspondence during this period indicates their relations and the subjects they discussed. And they talked about the book, with which Edward was immensely pleased; and they talked of his return. When Guedalla sent a set of his books to the Windsors for their villa near Antibes, the Duke replied: 'I certainly hope it will not be too long before we shall be asking for one for the Fort.' The Duke came to see Guedalla as a potential saviour from exile. But he came to see him as something more. For Edward, while contented in his marriage, was lonely and troubled, and cried out for manly, amusing and accomplished friends. He did not find very many; but Guedalla's company he certainly found magnetic, relaxing and endlessly entertaining. This craving for masculine affection was a reflection of the friendships to which he had been inclined in his long youth.

In July 1939 the book was finished, and Guedalla was invited to bring the final text to the Windsors at La Croë, their coastal retreat in the South of France. The Duke and Duchess were both delighted with the book, and felt it would have a strong and sympathetic effect on public opinion. 'When the book is published we shall have champagne at 11 a.m.', wrote the Duchess, alluding to Baldwin's request for whisky during a morning audience with Edward VIII, 'thus putting Mr B. into the novice class.' Back in England in early August Guedalla submitted the proofs and wrote to the Duke on 8th: 'The greatest pleasure I have found in it has been to discover that I started it . . . in the hope of serving the one person whom I knew, and have ended it by coming to know the other and hoping to be of service to both.' He wrote that he was off on a ten-week British Council tour of South America; and that *The Hundredth Year* would be published on the first Monday of September 1939.

What did *The Hundredth Year* have to say about the Abdication? It is mainly of interest for the skill of its attack on Baldwin, whom Guedalla saw as the

Leaving No. 10, Downing Street, during the week of the Abdication Crisis: left, MONCKTON, *'our old friend' – loyal, but to whom? Right,* BALDWIN – *'the villain of the piece'*

Radio Times Hulton Picture Library

Keystone Press

EDWARD VIII *broadcasting to the nation making his abdication speech, 1936*

villain of the piece. As Baldwin was still alive, it would have been impossible to say outright that he had connived at the Abdication. But, like a prosecutor, Guedalla investigated his character and past career, and pointed to evidence of hypocrisy, opportunism and slow cunning. 'A countryman whose life was passed in urban occupations, and industrialist who seemed to view the march of industry with unconcealed regret, Mr Baldwin was full of interesting contradictions and divergent loyalties.' The Hoare-Laval affair had taught him that 'if moral issues were going to be raised in future, he would be found on the winning side'; and the political drift of 1936 made him yearn for 'a success'. Baldwin later said that he 'knew the people'. What he *really* meant was that he knew that there were powerful forces in the Conservative electorate which disliked King Edward. Guedalla suggests what these forces were and what their motives:

> '. . . In the 1930s nothing was quite what it pretended to be. Sparse remnants of the old nobility pretended to be rich; the rich pretended to be noble; sporting stockbrokers masqueraded as fox-hunting squires; and practically everyone above a certain income level indulged in some form or other of social impersonation . . . Society was now recruited from an eager middle class after a brief financial scrutiny . . . Was the King sufficiently exclusive? And for that matter, were they? . . . He was devoid of all pretence . . . Upon a lower level . . . the smaller gentry still surveyed an increasingly inhospitable world . . . Their finances were a long and wearying rearguard action: and there was little left to emphasize their own superiority except . . . the cherished forms of Court – and what was now happening to these?. . .'

Baldwin realised (so Guedalla inferred) that these classes could always be relied upon to welcome the departure of Edward VIII, who otherwise represented the sympathies of an entire generation.

If it had been more fortunate in its timing, it is perfectly possible that *The Hundredth Year* might have achieved some of its desired effect. But as it happened, the day before it was due to appear Britain declared war on Germany; and the publishers – Thornton Butterworth – refused, under their 'Act of God' clause, to issue it that year. Guedalla was in Brazil. He asked to return home, but was instructed to lecture in the Allied interest in the Americas. The book added to numerous anxieties. He wrote about it despairingly to the Duke; and he had it published in the United States that November. He wrote threateningly to Butterworth that the book trade appeared to be flourishing under the 'Phoney War' and they had simply no excuse for non-publication. To this, Butterworth (who had received dark hints from the wartime authorities that the book would not be welcome) replied in February 1940 that they regarded the whole work as defamatory and unpublishable. Guedalla, who was inclined to be temperamental, exploded with rage, and instructed his lawyers to sue Butterworth for breach of contract.

In March 1940 Guedalla and his wife left New York (where they had spent a dismal four months conducting discreet propaganda) on an American ship bound for Italy. They spent two nights in Paris on the way home, and dined on both nights with the Windsors at the Boulevard Suchet. Mrs Guedalla wrote of those evenings in her diary. On the first evening, March 7th, there was a sizeable party; the Duke was nervous and spoke gloomily about the progress of the War. But the following night there were just the four of them, and Edward was relaxed and delightful and full of his old charm. After dinner he and Guedalla talked privately, as they had also done that afternoon, while the Duchess confided in Mrs Guedalla that Edward could not possibly have married her – morganatically or otherwise – and remained King. As for their chances of return: 'They both realise it is rather up to Walter, but she is inclined to make allowances for him with all his bother and new responsibilities . . .'.

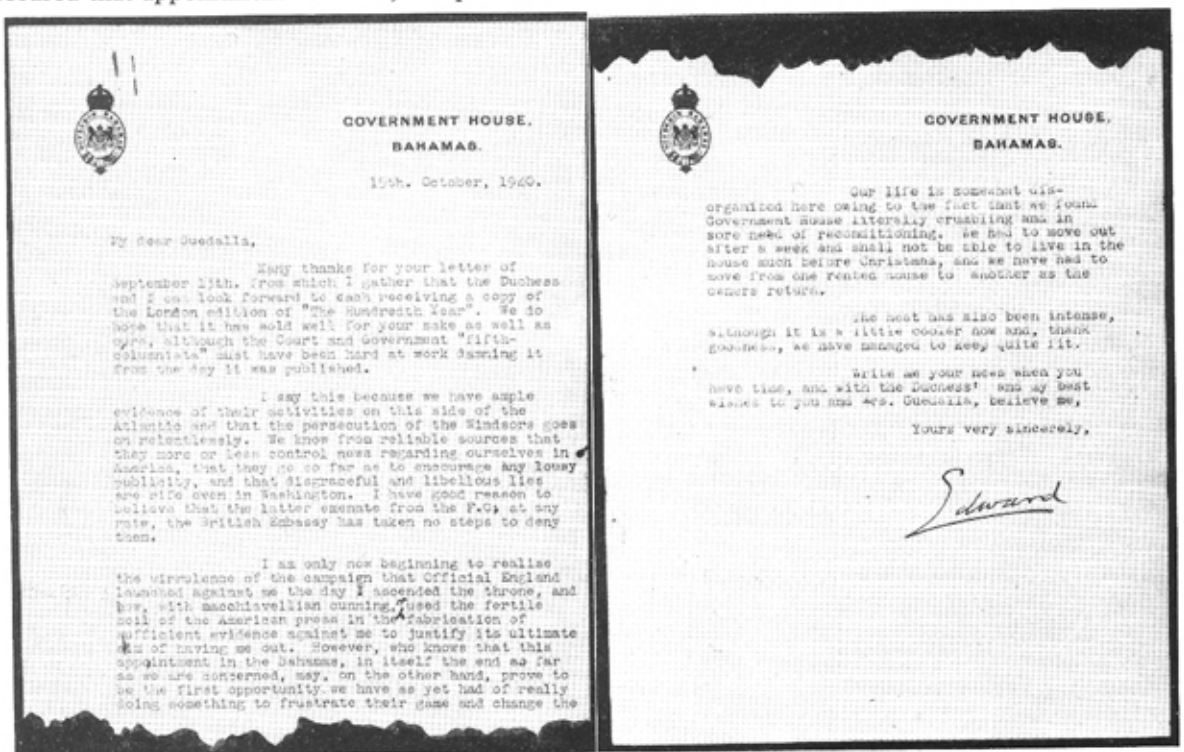
Monckton had now become a powerful war bureaucrat, as head of the Censorship Bureau and Assistant Director of the Ministry of Information; and the Duke was altogether uncertain about him. 'I'm afraid it's that way with 99% of people who suddenly become high officials,' he wrote to Guedalla some months later. 'Rightly or wrongly, they at once put personal loyalties second to the

interest of the Government they are serving.' This perplexity was one of the matters they discussed in Paris that March; and in their correspondence between March and May they write often of Monckton, to whom they give the cryptic designation (for all their letters were intercepted) of 'our old friend'. 'Our old friend stalled about seeing me for a week,' wrote Guedalla back in London, 'but since then he has developed a taste for my society . . . so I suspect your telephone has been busy.' The Duke wrote that 'we can sense in our old friend a certain wariness where I am concerned . . .' Guedalla made no attempt to reassure the Duke. He was now on the way to replacing Monckton as the Duke's agent and confidant.

Meanwhile, what of the book? Guedalla wrote to Edward on March 21st: 'I am pushing the publishers and lawyers as hard as I can and think we are getting nearer to an early decision to publish on the part of these weak-kneed gentry.' He confessed that he had capitulated to a demand for excisions; but the Duke assured him that 'the omissions . . . are trifling as compared to what I thought they might ask for'. Finally Guedalla wrote that publication had been fixed for the end of May. 'But the delay has been so long that you must have felt sure I had secured that appointment at Court, complete with key.'

The Duke could not have felt sanguine that it would help him now. On May 3rd 1940 he wrote an altogether remarkable letter to Guedalla. Disaster, he suggested, was about to strike in the West. The chaos that was wartime France was no match for 'the calculating shrewdness and freedom of action of the Nazi chiefs'. The only hope for Britain was to ditch 'leaders . . . tainted with the series of past blunders in foreign politics that are responsible for the present mess', and substitute 'men . . . of clear minds and greater liberty of action . . . with common and not necessarily political sense'. Thus he predicted by exactly one week the replacement of Chamberlain by the Churchill coalition, and the sweep of the Germans across the Low Countries and France.

As the disaster unfolded, the Duke left Paris (May 28th) to join his wife at Antibes. On June 3rd – their third wedding anniversary, as it happened – they got a telegram from Guedalla to say *The Hundredth Year* had been published that day. It was the last day of Dunkirk. Three days later the Duke telegraphed back: 'We thank you both anniversary message and wish book the success it deserves.' On June 10th the Italians invaded the South of France. True to the policy of entirely ignoring the Windsors, the British Government made not the slightest attempt to save



GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
BAHAMAS.

19th. October, 1940.

My dear Guedalla,

Many thanks for your letter of September 13th. from which I gather that the Duchess and I can look forward to each receiving a copy of the London edition of "The Hundredth Year". We do hope that it has sold well for your sake as well as ours, although the Court and Government "fifth-columnists" must have been hard at work damning it from the day it was published.

I say this because we have ample evidence of their activities on this side of the Atlantic and that the persecution of the Windsors goes on relentlessly. We know from reliable sources that they more or less control news regarding ourselves in America, that they go so far as to encourage any lousy publicity, and that disgraceful and libellous lies are rife even in Washington. I have good reason to believe that the latter emanate from the F.O; at any rate, the British Embassy has taken no steps to deny them.

I am only now beginning to realise the virulence of the campaign that Official England launched against me the day I ascended the throne, and how, with machiavellian cunning, fused the fertile soil of the American press in the fabrication of sufficient evidence against me to justify its ultimate aim of having me out. However, who knows that this appointment in the Bahamas, in itself the end as far as we are concerned, may, on the other hand, prove to be the first opportunity we have as yet had of really doing something to frustrate their game and change the

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
BAHAMAS.

Our life is somewhat disorganized here owing to the fact that we found Government House literally crumbling and in sore need of reconditioning. We had to move out after a week and shall not be able to live in the house much before Christmas, and we have had to move from one rented house to another as the owners return.

The heat has also been intense, although it is a little cooler now and, thank goodness, we have managed to keep quite fit.

Write us your news when you have time, and with the Duchess' and my best wishes to you and Mrs. Guedalla, believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

Edward

By kind permission of the executors of H.R.H. the Duke of Windsor

the ex-King of England from falling into enemy hands. He was left to flee precariously into Spain with his wife and friends, and thence make his way to Lisbon, where he pleaded to return to England, asking only that his wife be accepted as royal. Churchill refused; the Prime Minister's P.S. called on the Colonial Secretary's P.S. to ask 'Is there a governorship going spare?'; and the Bahamas were chosen as the place of ducal wartime exile. When news came that attempts were being made to persuade the Windsors to remain in Portugal, the 'old friend' was sent out to join them. Lady Donaldson accepts the extraordinary German assertion (in captured wartime documents) that the Duke had been virtually tricked into staying; but Monckton, writing in the 1950s, deprecated that assertion as absurd. Edward left Europe (as he had always intended) on 1st August – though hardly able to tell, said Monckton, who was his friend.

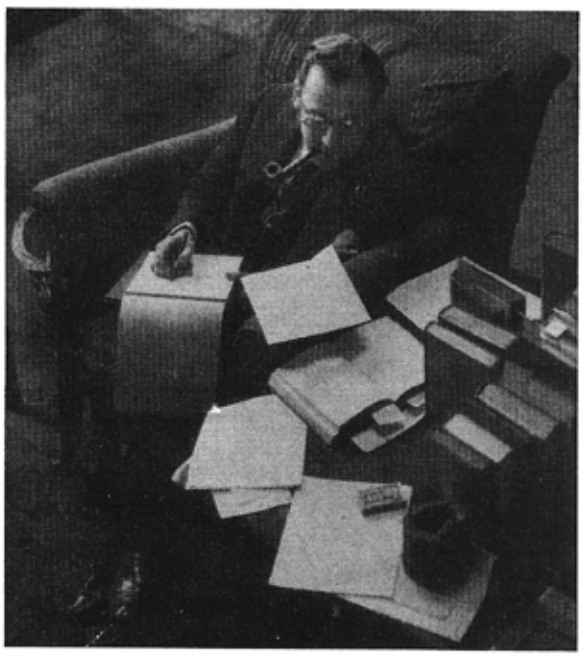
Was he beyond helping now? In October 1940 Guedalla made one last, desperate attempt to save Edward's situation. Duff Cooper had made him head of the Latin American Section of the Ministry of Information that summer, which put him in a powerful position in view of his additional role at the British Council. He acquired control of the committee responsible for distributing propaganda newsreels to the colonies, and thus opened up an official channel of communication with the Duke in Nassau. There was a proposal to send an important British Mission to South America. Guedalla made strenuous efforts to recommend the Duke. But Edward wrote hopelessly that 'the very fact that it would certainly be more interesting wartime employment for us, and possibly more useful, is just the reason why they would never send us to South America'; and indeed, the Mission was finally entrusted to 'that charming but senile old nobleman Lord Willingdon'. At the same time Guedalla was mysteriously dismissed from the Ministry, 'unlamented, I think, by our old friend, who continues to charm everybody and to accumulate fresh jobs without doing anything in particular'. Then Lord Lloyd died in February 1941; and Guedalla – to the general surprise – was passed over for the Chair of the British Council.

So they were both failures now; it was the end of hope. Guedalla would never taste power or a peerage; and the Duke would never come home. In their common consciousness of unfulfilled expectation they now found a most intimate bond, expressed in a long, sad correspondence over the next four years. Edward would write of how keenly he felt betrayed and of his struggle to make the best of his unpromising appointment; while Guedalla would write about the war and life in England, and assure him that 'your occupations are never far from my mind'.

Philip Guedalla spent the rest of the War – when not engaged in the forlorn effort to salvage the interests of the ex-King across the water – writing his excellent popular lives of Churchill and Marshals Bazaine and Pétain, acquiring a reputation as a broadcaster of homely talks, and touring the Middle East as official historian of the air war there. Twenty thousand miles of flying in unpressurized aeroplanes proved too much for the heart which had been pronounced unfit in 1916; and in December 1944 – as the Duke of Windsor prepared to leave his colony for unredeemed exile with the words 'Never speak to me again of British fair play!' – Guedalla died in London at the age of fifty-five. 'We realise we have lost a true friend', telegraphed the Duke to his widow. How is one to characterize their extraordinary friendship? It was a relation of perfect sympathy between two *manqués*: the man once expected to become Prime Minister, who never even entered Parliament; and the man born to be King, who reigned less than a year.

NOTES ON FURTHER READING

Philip Guedalla, *Argentine Tango, The Hundred Years* and *Mr Churchill: A Portrait,* Hodder & Stoughton (London, 1932); *The Hundredth Year,* Eyre & Spottiswoode (London, 1940).



By courtesy of the author

Philip Guedalla towards the end of his life