

# THE CORONATION STONE.

## AND ITS STORY.

IN a previous issue we made brief reference to the *Lia Fail* or Stone of Destiny which is placed beneath the seat of the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey, and on which King Edward VII. is to be crowned on Saturday. It is composed of the dark, hard, close-grained Syennite stone—named from Syenna, in Upper Egypt, where it abounds—and is about three feet and a quarter long, two and a half broad, and one and a half thick. It is one of the most curious historic relics in the British Isles. A long line of Irish, Scottish, and English monarchs have been crowned upon it. With one exception every sovereign of En land has been crowned upon it since the days of Edward II. with the sole exception of Queen Mary—daughter of Henry VIII. and Catherine of Arragon. And she, in order to secure her right of succession, had to be crowned in hot haste, and without the usual formalities, for was not Lady Jane Grey in the field, supported by numbers of disaffected nobles? A few further words regarding the story of this historical object cannot fail to interest our readers at the present juncture.

### The Lia Fail

or Stone of Destiny is said to have been used at the coronation of Irish Kings long before the Christian era. Strange myths circled round the stone. For instance, it was stated that it groaned or gave out a sound when the lawful king stood upon it, but was as silent as the grave when the candidate for royal honors was not the rightful king—was not in the line of succession to the throne. In the far past—so the story runneth—Feca Fioun was inaugurated upon it king of Ireland. But the stone was mute. Whereupon Cuchullin struck it rudely, perhaps in anger, and it is said that from that hour it gave forth no sound until the day when Conn of the Hundred Battles was crowned upon it the lawful king of Erin.

The ancient story of the 'Baile an Seail' in O'Curry's lectures tells how, at sunrise one morning Conn, with his three druids and his three poets, was out upon the royal rath or mound of Tara. He happened to stand upon a stone, which forthwith screamed under his feet, so that it was heard all over Tara. Conn asked the druid to explain the cry and its meaning. The druid took three and fifty days to reply. At the end of that period he told Conn that it was the Lia Fail, that its scream was a prophecy, and that the number of calls given by it indicated the number of kings of his race that should reign in green Eire of the six ages.

The last 'feis' or convention of the States of Ireland was held in Tara in the year 551. Soon afterwards a malediction was pronounced upon the palace by St. Rolanus, of Lothra, in the present county of Tipperary, in punishment for the violation of the Saint's sanctuary by the king. The royal hill was deserted and was soon overgrown with grass and weeds. No subsequent Irish king resided there, and each selected his abode according to the dynasty to which he belonged. In the meantime

### An Irish Colony

from Antrim had secured a good grip on a portion of western Scotland, having battled with almost unbroken success with the Picts there from about the year 503-506 without much aid from their kin beyond the North Channel. At one time, however, the Picts got the upper hand in the long-drawn struggle and drove the Irish Dalriads out of the country. But the defeated invaders gathered together a stronger force, swept across the narrow sea in their long galleys under the leadership of Loarn, Aengus, and Fergus—the three sons of Erc—invalued Alba once more, subjugated the Picts, and established the Scottish monarchy. Things went gaily enough for the new transmarine Irish colony until the sixth century was drawing near to its third quarter. Then Aedh (or Hugh), son of Ainmire, came to the throne as high-king of Ireland. In 573 he summoned the great convention of Drumceat (in Roe Park, near Newtown Limavaddy, in the present county of Derry)—the first meeting of the States of Ireland that had been held since the abandonment of Tara. One of the questions to be settled at the convention was the relations between the Scottish colonies of Alba and the mother-country. The Irish monarch desired to impose tribute on the colony. St. Columcille—who was the founder of Iona and a member of the royal race of Ulster—attended the convention, accompanied by a number of bishops and monks, and by his friend Aidan (or Hugh), who was king of the colony beyond the water. St. Columcille saw in the exaction of tribute the prospect of endless wars and bloodshed between the two countries, and—wiser than the advisers of the Third George of England—he prevailed upon the king of Ireland to abandon his claims against Alba, thus establishing the independence of the Scottish colony and severing it permanently from the mother-country.

But St. Columcille did more than this. According to the common account, he secured from the King of Ireland the loan of the Lia Fail to give an added glory and security to the coronation of the kings of the young colony beyond the sea. It was

### Brought to Scotland

by him and Hugh. A very ancient Irish quatrain speaks of the stone as follows:—

'Cineadh saor an fhine  
Mun budh breag an thsaine  
Mar a mluighid an Lia Fail  
Dlighid flaitheas do ghabhaill.'

Hector Boetius condensed this into the following Latin couplet:—

'Ni fallat fatum, Scoti, quocumque locatum  
Invenient lapidem hunc, regnum tenebunt ibidem'

Which, in English dress, runneth thus:—

'If fate's decrees be not announced in vain,  
Where'er this stone is found, the Scots shall reign.'

So the legend ran. And hence the desire of the kings of the Irish colony in Scotland to be crowned upon the Lia Fail. Fergus seems to have been the first crowned upon it on Scottish soil. The borrowers forgot to return the great Irish heirloom, and it remained at their royal residence at Dunstaffnage, in north-west Argyre, till about the year 850, when Kenneth MacAlpine swooped upon and finally conquered the Picts and became the first king of all Scotland. Then the Stone of Destiny was removed to the monastery of Scone, in Perthshire till the year 1296, when Edward I., King of England, carried it away and deposited it

### In Westminster Abbey,

where it is to be seen to this day. Haverly and others quite disagree with the opinion of Dr. Petrie that the Lia Fail is the present pillar stone which stands over the 'Croppies' Grave' on one of the great raths or mounds of Tara; and it seems clearly established that this curious relic of ancient Irish political life was transferred to Scotland and thence to Westminster Abbey.

The old prophecy has been fulfilled in a curious way, for, says Haverly, 'it is remarkable that the present reigning family of England owes its right to the throne to its descent, through the Stuart family, from those Irish Dalriads.' In 1314, after Robert Bruce and his gallant 30,000 men had inflicted such a decisive defeat on the British arms, a peace followed and a demand was made for restitution of the regalia of Scotland. But the Londoners would not give up the stone. They knew the old prophecy, and exclaimed: 'We will fight for the stone; the safety of our kingdom depends upon it.' And so the Lia Fail remained in Westminster.

## The Late Archbishop Croke.

[CONTRIBUTED.]

TELEGRAMS from London, of date 22nd July, announced the demise of the gifted and patriotic Archbishop of Cashel and Emly. Earlier intelligence told that the illustrious prelate was dangerously ill, and that the Pope had sent him his blessing. Evidently the end was approaching—the end of a truly great champion of creed and country. The Catholics of his day in Auckland will never forget his letters on Masonry and Orangism, and the consternation they caused in these two hotbeds of bigotry. His preaching, too, in old St. Patrick's attracted universal attention. All denominations thronged to the Cathedral to hear his brilliant discourses. Usually there were crowds around the door and alongside the windows outside, the capacity of the church being quite unequal to the demand on such occasions. One had to go an hour before the appointed time in order to find sitting or even standing room. This went on for three years, when, to Auckland's great loss, Dr. Croke left the shores of New Zealand. This, however, was Ireland's gain. His letters on the Home Rule question, his brilliant speeches throughout his Archdiocese in support of the National cause, attracted profound attention and gave the movement an impetus and nerve that bore it on to the very brink of complete triumph. Useless to recount the sad cause of temporary failure. Suffice it to say that Dr. Croke, the patriotic prelate, did his part nobly and fearlessly. When yet Home Rule will be granted, his honored name will be mentioned with reverence and respect. As his sage advice and his generous purse were always at the service of his country, so the spirit of patriotism and generosity he infused will not fail until victory shall crown the Home Rule movement and make Old Ireland a nation once again.

No prelate was better known in ecclesiastical circles. There was no National movement but felt the support of his voice and purse and pen. And the diocese of Auckland, his first See, he never ceased to help, as his successors have thankfully acknowledged.

The following brief biography of the deceased prelate will be interesting to the readers of the TABLET. It is taken from the late Dr. Comerford's 'History of the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin': 'Dr. Croke was Professor of Humanities at Kildare College in 1847, and left, early in 1849, for the Irish College in Paris, having been appointed Professor of Dogmatic Theology in that institution. His Grace is a native of County Cork, having been born near Mallow, May 19, 1824. He entered the Irish College, Paris, in 1839, whence he removed, in 1845, to become Professor of Rhetoric and the Mathematics in the College Episcopale de Merien, near Courtrai in Belgium. In November, 1845, he proceeded to the Irish College, Rome, took his degree of D.D. in the Roman College, and was ordained priest on the 28th May, 1847. On relinquishing his professorship at Paris, Dr. Croke returned to Ireland, where he served on the mission for about six years. He was afterwards president of the newly-established College of St. Colman, Fermoy, in which position he continued for the succeeding eight years, at the termination of which he received the appointment of P.P. of Doneraile. Four years later he was chosen by the Holy See as Bishop of Auckland, New Zealand, and was consecrated on the 10th July, 1870, in the Church of St. Agatha, Rome, by his Eminence Cardinal Cullen, assisted by Dr. Murphy, Bishop of Hobartown, and Dr. Quinn, Bishop of Brisbane. In June, 1875, Dr. Croke was appointed Archbishop of Cashel, in succession to the Most Rev. Dr. Leahy.'

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