

CONCERNING CORONATIONS

IMPRESSIVE CEREMONIES OF BYGONE AGES

The Coronation of a British sovereign—of one who, like King George V., rules over so vast an Empire—is naturally regarded as an event of more than ordinary importance (says the *Ave Maria*). Indeed, it may unhesitatingly be affirmed that the approaching coronation celebrations will surpass in magnitude and brilliancy everything of the kind that has been witnessed in bygone ages. The time has long since passed when an English Catholic king was crowned by a Catholic prelate within the historic walls of Westminster Abbey; nevertheless, the present occasion is one when one may opportunely revive the story of coronation rites in pre-Reformation days, and note how far they have survived in modern Anglican formularies.

Previous to the introduction of the Catholic Faith into the British Isles, the kings of these countries were doubtless inaugurated according to the custom usual among Northern tribes. The ceremony was of a simple description. The rude chieftains selected one among their number to be ruler; and, after hoisting him on a buckler, they carried him round the camp to receive the recognition of his sovereignty. This recognition was obtained by the vociferous acclamations of the fighting men. But with the spread of Christianity there came the introduction of formal prayers and symbolical rites, among which the anointing with sacred oil and the imposition of a crown hold a conspicuous place. The anointing with holy oil was intended to denote the outpouring of divine grace requisite for the sovereign to discharge his duties befittingly; as also to symbolise special consecration to God, apart from whom kings can not rightly reign. The act of crowning signified the assumption of the highest power of ruling in temporal concerns. Both the anointing and the crowning are recorded to have been in vogue with the ancient people of God.

The earliest known instance of a British king receiving the blessing of the Church on his commencing to reign is that of Aidan of Dalriada, in the sixth century. St. Columba performed the rite in Iona, and it consisted of prayer and the imposition of the abbot's hands. And, although no explicit mention is made of either anointing or crowning, we know from Gildas the historian (A.D. 547) that these practices were familiar in Britain at that very time.

The most ancient service we possess for the consecration of a king is to be found in the Pontifical of Egbert of York (737). According to the rite therein laid down, all the bishops took part in the ceremony. It commenced after the Gospel of the Mass. The oil, in true Scriptural fashion, was poured out from a horn upon the king's head; a sceptre was delivered into his hand, and the function concluded with coronation. After the king had received the homage of the peers, the Mass was resumed. The most highly developed service for an English coronation, however, is not to be met with until the fourteenth century. The book containing it is still preserved among the treasures of Westminster. From this *'Liber Regalis,'* as it is generally called, all subsequent coronation ceremonial has been derived.

According to this Medieval Rite,

on the eve of coronation day the king rode from the Tower through the principal streets of the city of London to the royal palace of Westminster. Having arrived there, he passed under the paternal care of the abbot of the adjoining monastery. This prelate, by means of spiritual exhortations and ceremonial instructions, prepared the king for the sacred rites of the morrow. When day dawned, the king rose for Matins and Mass before the more elaborate function began. At an appointed hour, all the peers of the realm assembled in the great hall to meet the king, preparatory to his passing into the church for the solemn rite of his coronation. A throne, adorned with cloth of gold, had been previously prepared in the midst of the hall; and, in memory of those ancient days when kings were raised aloft on shields, the English sovereign was reverently lifted into his chair, which is still known as the 'King's Bench.'

At this stage of the proceedings a procession of bishops, together with the abbot and monks of Westminster, arrived in the hall. They came, according to ancient custom, arrayed in rich copes, and bearing crosses, censers, and jewelled Books of the Gospels, to conduct the king to the minster. The golden spurs, the stone chalice of St. Edward, the swords, sceptres, and other royal insignia having been delivered to special dignitaries, the augmented procession set out for the church. The king wore his robe of state over a long silken shirt especially arranged to open for the anointing. Over him the Barons of the Cinque Ports supported a blue silk canopy, the silver staves of which were adorned with tinkling bells. On his right walked the Bishop of Durham, and on his left the Bishop of Bath and Wells.

Having passed under the portals of the great church, the monks intoned the antiphon *Tu es Petrus*, in honor of the patron saint of the abbey. When the prelates and nobles had filed into their places, the king passed to the

lofty platform which had been erected in the centre of the church, in sight of all the assembled multitude. There and then took place

The Formal Recognition of the Sovereign by the people. The Archbishop of Canterbury presented the king at each of the four sides of the platform, and the assembly by their acclamations manifested their willingness to acknowledge him as their lawful ruler.

On the completion of this ceremony, the primate assumed his sacred vestments, and, standing at the altar, received the first oblation of the king, consisting of a poundweight of gold, and a pallium or cloth for the altar. This act was intended to fulfil the divine precept of not appearing empty before the Lord God.

After the prayer *Deus humilium*, a sermon was preached by one of the assisting bishops. The sermon over, the king, with much solemnity, took the coronation oath, in which he swore to maintain intact the laws, constitutions, and liberties granted to the clergy and people of the realm by devout kings, and especially by the glorious St. Edward.

As is usual in all undertakings of ecclesiastical importance, the aid of the Holy Spirit was invoked in the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*. Two bishops, acting as cantors, now sang the Litany of the Saints, which was followed by the Seven Penitential Psalms, four prayers, and a preface. During all these solemn invocations the king had been lying prostrate before the altar; he now arose and prepared for the anointing. The silver hooks of his under robes were first of all unfastened; the Wardens of the Cinque Ports meanwhile brought forward a canopy to screen the king; and the archbishop, approaching the kneeling sovereign, imparted the sacred unction. In the first place he anointed the hands with the Oil of Catechumens, while the choir chanted the antiphon *Unxerunt Salomonem*, etc. A prayer followed; then came the anointing of the breast, between the shoulders, both shoulders themselves, the joints, or 'boughs,' of the arms, and lastly the crown of the head. To this last anointing there was added the Sign of the Cross with holy chrism. The Abbot of Westminster then closed up the royal garments, and the primate sang two prayers of benediction.

The Anointed King

new stood up to be invested with his coronation robes and other royal insignia. In the first place, an amice, or coif of linen, was adjusted about his head to prevent the holy oil from flowing down upon his garments. It was the abbot's duty to vest the king; he therefore proceeded to clothe him with the *colobium sindonis*, a robe corresponding to our alb. It was usually made of fine linen or lawn, sometimes of silk. Buskins and sandals, resembling those worn by a bishop at Pontifical Mass, were also provided for the king's feet.

Special blessings were imparted to the other regal ornaments, and the vesting then continued. First came the dalmatic, in form not unlike that used by a deacon, or by a bishop under his chasuble when he celebrates High Mass. In its regal shape, however, it was long and richly embroidered with figures in gold. From the time of Charles II. the dalmatic has been made with an opening down the front, probably for the sake of convenience.

The sword, having been blessed and presented, was girded on over the dalmatic. The royal spurs were also fastened to the king's sandals. The vestment next imposed was the 'armilla,' or stole. It was arranged round the neck as an ordinary stole; but instead of hanging pendent like that of a bishop, or crosswise like that of a priest, it was fixed by means of ribbons to the arms, both above and below the elbows; hence, perhaps, the name 'armilla,' signifying a bracelet.

The king was next arrayed in the most important of St. Edward's robes—namely, the pallium, or royal mantle. This vestment resembles a cope in appearance, and is woven throughout with golden eagles. The crown, having been blessed, sprinkled with holy water, and incensed, was next placed upon the head of the king; the archbishop meanwhile repeating the form, 'God crown thee with the crown of glory and justice,' etc. Then came the delivery of the ring, symbolical of the union between the sovereign and his kingdom.

After the ceremony of offering the sword at the altar and redeeming it again had been duly performed, the sceptres were delivered into the hands of the sovereign. That with the cross, symbolical of royal authority, was held in the right hand; that surmounted with the dove, and more correctly styled the rod, being supported in the left. Here it may be noted that the orb and cross is in reality the same ornament as the sceptre; its separate delivery dates only from the time of James II., when it was erroneously regarded as an independent ornament. The king, now fully arrayed in all the insignia of his exalted office, seated in St. Edward's Chair, was blessed by the archbishop, after which all the prelates present were received to the kiss of peace. What may be termed

The Culminating Act

was reserved for this point of the service. During the chanting of the *Te Deum* the crowned king was conducted with great pomp to his royal throne on the elevated platform. After taking his seat thereon, the primate recited the words, 'Stand and hold fast from henceforth,' etc., still read at modern coronations. When the enthronisation had been completed, all the peers of the realm