

ENGLISH CORONATIONS OF THE PAST

With the entire English-speaking world on tip-toe over the coronation of King George V., on June 22 next, a glance back over the coronation ceremonies of English kings of the past, considering only those whose coronations presented unusual features, is of interest. As a matter of fact, the coronation of a sovereign is of no means essential to authority. It is simply a formal ceremony not unlike the inaugural parade of a president of the United States. Several of the monarchs of Europe now reigning have never been crowned, notably the king of Spain, the king of Sweden and the emperor of Germany. The romantic cry "The king is dead; long live the king!" is literally true, for the reign of the new ruler begins not with his coronation, but with the death of his predecessor. But, for all that, English kings and queens have always observed the ceremony of being crowned.

There is a relic of most unusual interest in the British museum, it is a copy of the Four Gospels of King Athelstane. It is supposed to have been written early in the tenth century by the king, who reigned from 925 to 945, and presented by him to Christ Church, at Canterbury. Tradition has it that this Gospel was sent to Athelstane at the beginning of his reign by the German emperor, Otto, whose sister the English king married. Furthermore, it is supposed that all the very early English kings took their coronation oaths on this volume.

In the same place is another relic said to be the coronation pledge of King Ethelred. It was devised by Saint Dunstan and was used, so the record runs, when Ethelred was crowned at Kingston on Thames in 978. It reads:

"In the name of the Holy Trinity I promise three things to the Christian people and my subjects: First, that God's church and all Christian people of my dominion hold true peace; the second is that I forbid robbery and all unrighteous things to all orders; the third, that I promise and enjoin in all dooms justice and mercy, that the gracious and merciful God in His everlasting mercy may forgive us all who live and reigneth."

In the king's library of the British museum it is recorded that an account of the coronation of English kings was first presented in book form during the reign of Henry VIII. In the reign of Edward VI, engravings depicting the coronation of former English kings were first circulated.

Arthur H. Bevan, in his "Crowning the King" selects the coronation of the mythical or traditional King Arthur as the first of its kind, King Arthur being accepted as the first British sovereign. In the Palace library, of Lambeth, England, a fifteenth century volume, entitled "The St. Alban's Chronicles of England," contains illuminated illustrations of the crowning of Arthur.

Seated on a plain chair of state beneath a bell-shaped canopy of blue and attired in a long brown robe with an ermine cape not unlike a dressing gown, he holds in his right hand a sceptre and his left is laid across his breast. On either side of him stands a dignitary of the church supporting over his head a plain circlet of gold with four fleur-de-lis points. Before him kneels a figure rendering him homage and in the background are the figures of two officers of state.

The ceremony is estimated to have occurred over 14 centuries ago, though the date is purely problematical. The picture itself throws no light on the subject, for its caption merely describes it as "How Arthur was crowned king of Britain and after Drove out the Saxons and conquered Scotland, Ireland, also Jutland and Iceland." Tradition has it that Arthur was crowned at Stonehenge, which had been magically transported from Ireland to Salisbury Plain.

The pretty idea that an English king is wedded to his people with a ring dates back to the time of Edward the Confessor, 1042. Edward, the story

goes, was taking the air one day near his palace at Westminster when a pilgrim, en route to Jerusalem, stopped him and asked for alms. The king had no money with him, but he drew a gold ring from his finger and presented it to the beggar. Upon arriving in Jerusalem the pilgrim narrated the incident to the patriarch at the Holy Sepulchre who was so impressed by the generosity of the act that he blessed the ring, gave it back to the pilgrim and instructed him to restore it to the king in London. The pilgrim did so, and this same ring was used at all the coronations up to the Reformation. Then a new one was made engraved with a cross of St. George.

Prior to 1688 all coronations are said to have taken place on a Sunday or a festival day. Indeed, 16 of the 21 early English coronations occurred on a Sunday. William the Conqueror was crowned on a Sunday, Christmas day, 1066, and was the first king to receive his sovereignty in Westminster. The building was crowded by a joyous shouting throng at the beginning of the ceremony. In some way the Royal Horse Guards misinterpreted their shouts and set fire to the gates, the spectators, panic-stricken, rushed out and were slaughtered by the Norman cavalry. Therefore the coronation ceremony of William the Conqueror was consummated in an almost empty building.

The best authentic description of an early coronation procession is to be found in manuscript form in the British museum. It describes the coronation of Richard I, "Richard the Lion Hearted," on Sept. 3, 1189, in Westminster Abbey. According to this manuscript, the procession was headed by many monks followed by two bishops carrying croziers, four barons with candles in silver candlesticks and then two more bishops bearing crosses. After them came the Earl Marshal with the sceptre surmounted by a cross, and the Earl of Salisbury carrying the virga regalis surmounted by a dove.

The three swords of state were next in line, being borne by John, Earl of Mortain and Gloucester, who afterwards became King John. Four nobles then appeared carrying the coronation robes and treasures in a chest, then came the Earl of Albemarle and Essex bearing the royal crown. Immediately behind him came the king.

He was attended by the bishops of Durham and Bath who even now retain the privilege of attending the person of a sovereign on such an occasion. An exceedingly rich canopy was supported over the head of King Richard by four nobles. After taking the royal oath the king was anointed.

It is recorded that the spectators were terrorized by seeing a bat fluttering above the throne and considered it an evil omen. The conclusion of the coronation ceremony was marked by a wholesale butchery of the Jews. They had been ordered to remain away from the Abbey but came to the ceremony with many rich gifts for the king. The inflated populace fell upon them, and the massacre spread from London to other cities.

Nov. 6, 1429, witnessed the coronation of Henry VI, the first boy king of England. Although but nine years of age it is recorded that he was attired in bishop's robes. According to the historian the church services and exhortations were lengthy indeed; at their conclusion he was arrayed in cloth of gold and crowned in the shrine of Edward the Confessor. After the procession a great banquet was given in his honor in Westminster Hall.

The lad was exceedingly fatigued, says the historian, and took no interest in the wild lion's head and ventrals that formed the chief part of the menu; suddenly, however, he became very animated when the royal chef's pastry, moulded in the form of men and animals grouped to represent historical and scriptural events, was brought in. He was especially pleased at a group showing St. Louis and St.



CROWNING THE KING

Edward in armor, with himself standing between them.

Henry III was twice crowned king of England. His first coronation was at Gloucester on Oct. 28, 1216, by the bishop of Winchester. The second was held four years later on May 17, at Westminster Abbey with the archbishop of Canterbury officiating. In the second coronation the king was seated on a double-tiered throne and bore the sceptre in his right hand and the model of a church in his left. The actual placing of the crown on his head was done by two prelates.

The coronation of King Richard the Third, on July 6, 1483, is said to have been the most splendid one up to that date. Six thousand gorgeously attired nobles of his court attended him in state from Baynard's castle to Westminster palace. He was crowned in the abbey by the archbishop of Canterbury. In the procession to the shrine of Edward the Confessor where the preliminaries were held, King Richard and his queen walked barefoot up the main aisle of Westminster Abbey, preceded by trumpeters, heralds, priests and abbots, and followed by the bishop of Rochester holding aloft a great jeweled cross. At the banquet that followed the duke of Norfolk, as earl marshal, kept order in the hall while mounted on his huge horse which was draped in cloth of gold.

Immediately after the defeat of Richard III at Bosworth, Henry VII was crowned on the battlefield. The defeated monarch had worn his crown into the battle, but had lost it in the melee. Lord Stanley, a noble, found it in a hawthorne bush, and, in the presence of the entire army, picked it up and placed it upon the head of the new King Henry. A little more than two months later, however, Henry was recrowned in Westminster Abbey. His queen, Elizabeth of York, was not crowned until nearly a month after his coronation.



HENRY VI, THE FIRST BOY KING OF ENGLAND

At the coronation of Queen Mary, 1552, three crowns were used—that of Edward the Confessor, the Imperial crown of England, and another one made expressly for her. Each in turn was placed upon her head. One historian narrates a peculiar circumstance of her coronation. She was to have been anointed it seems, with oil said to have been given St. Thomas of Canterbury by the Virgin Mary; at the last minute, however, it was feared that the oil had lost its efficacy and a fresh supply was forthwith consecrated. She also refused to sit in the coronation chair, claiming that it had been desecrated by her Protestant brother, Edward, and used another one by the pope.

The coronation of Queen Elizabeth, Jan. 15, 1558, was an unusually unique and stormy one. To be a prisoner in the Tower one minute and the queen of England the next is certainly far out of the ordinary. The entire ceremony was fraught with misunderstandings and strife, despite the fact that an astrologer had declared the day a propitious one. To begin with there was the change from the old Catholic order of procedure to the Protestant. As an instance, Elizabeth agreed to kiss the "pax," or wafer, but would not recognize the old formula to any further extent.

No little trouble was experienced in obtaining a church dignitary to perform the ceremony. The See of Canterbury was vacant; the primate of York objected to reading the litany in English and refused to officiate; finally, the bishop of Carlisle consented to fill the role. Elizabeth was crowned under the title, "The Most High and Mighty Princess, Our Dread Sovereign Lady Elizabeth, Queen of England, France, and Ireland, Defender of the true, ancient and Catholic faith, most worthy Empress from the Orkney Islands to the Pyrenean Mountains."

The superstitiously inclined found full justification of their views in the coronation of Charles the First on Feb. 2, 1626. As the chosen day happened to be the Feast of the Purification, and as white was the proper color for that day, the king's robe was of white instead of the usual purple velvet. Now, white was always considered an unlucky color for England's sovereigns. The next ominous event

was the breaking of the wing of the dove on the old sceptre. Following close on the heels of this misfortune the royal barge stuck fast at the palace and was eventually brought to the wrong landing.

To cap the climax and, as though to dispel any lingering doubt superstitious ones might still entertain, all London, that afternoon, was shaken by an earthquake. Whether or not this chain of accidents was intended as a warning, the fact remains that they all occurred at the coronation of a king who had lost his head.

On the twenty-third of April, 1661, St. George's day, Charles the Second entered his state barge early in the morning and went to Westminster. There he donned his robes of crimson velvet and ermine and moved in procession to the Abbey. Kneeling, he took the oath, which had again been altered, and was crowned by Archbishop Juxon. The crown, embellished with jewels, was a new one, as the old one had been destroyed in the civil wars. After the ceremony an elaborate banquet was given at Westminster Hall, preceded by what was believed to have been the first display of fireworks at an English coronation.

James II was crowned, with a pomp and ceremony that had never before been equaled, on St. George's Day, 1685, by Archbishop Sancroft who was ordered to abbreviate the ritual on the pretext of saving time, but in reality to appease the Catholic allegiance of the new king. There was no celebration of the Holy Communion, nor was a copy of the English Bible presented as was customary. It is related by historians that the specially prepared anointing oil so pleased the king and his queen that they made a present of two hundred pounds to the court apothecary. James' robe was of crimson velvet and ermine, with a border of gold lace; in the procession, he was sheltered by a canopy of gold.

From a political and religious standpoint, the coronation of William and Mary on April 11, 1689, was significant. They were crowned as joint sovereigns and the coronation rite was approved by act of parliament for the first time in history. This rite declared against transubstantiation of the bread and wine in the Holy Communion. Dean Stanley called attention to the fact that the coronation oath was "altered into conformity with actual usages of the kingdom to maintain the Protestant reformed religion as established by law."

Several unexpected incidents form interesting sidelights on the ceremony. The king was short and the queen unusually tall; chronicles relate with a chuckle that this disparity in their height afforded no end of suppressed merriment to the spectators as the two royal personages marched side by side up the aisle of the church. The house of commons was present in a body in a gallery directly behind the shrine of Edward the Confessor. As Archbishop Sancroft refused to officiate on the ground that William and Mary claimed the throne by act of parliament and not by hereditary descent, Thomas Lamplugh, archbishop of York, bishop of London, the king, and the Comptroller of the Exchequer, officiated. For the first time since the coronation of Edward VI a copy of the English Bible was presented. The day was considered unlucky by the Jacobites since it was neither a Sunday nor a festival. William had intended to make an offering of 20 guineas, but his purse was mysteriously stolen before the ceremony.

If there is anything in omens, that fact seemed certainly demonstrated at the coronation of George III, Sept. 22, 1761. A large diamond fell from his crown as he was walking about just after the ceremony, and many later declared it to be symbolic of the loss to England of her American colonies. The coronation day was the anniversary of the battle of Agincourt. Several changes were made in the coronation service by Archbishop Secker and it is related, the pretender, Prince Charles Edward, was present incognito. King George was but 22 years of age when crowned.

The coronation of King George IV, July 19, 1821, was marked by lavish display. Preparations for the event were made many weeks before hand and every detail was carefully planned. The coronation oath was altered to fit in with the union with the church of Ireland; several prayers were omitted in the ritual and no reference was made in them to the queen. The day was excessively hot and the king became very fatigued under his heavy and ornate coronation robes. A magnificent banquet followed in Westminster hall. Golden dishes were used and food and drinks provided with a lavish hand.

Exceeding all in splendor was the coronation of Queen Victoria, June 28, 1838, who was but 18 years of age when called to the throne. That the event was a popular one is attested by the fact that the population again and again broke forth in applause during the ceremony. At the moment the crown was actually placed on her head by Archbishop Howley the shouts and applause of the spectators reverberated through the Abbey like peals of thunder. The hallelujah chorus was sung by a choir and orchestra of 400.

The old custom of a coronation procession was revived and the cavalcade was made a spectacle of surpassing splendor. After the ceremony a banquet was held at the palace and later, at Apsley Hall, a ball was given attended by over 2,600 dancers. On the night of the coronation every theater in London was thrown open to the public.

One frequently thinks of a king's crown as of definite shape and design; but such is rarely the case. In England there have been many crowns, Athelstane's, for instance, resembled earl's, a fillet of gold with eight balls raised on points and with strawberry leaves between the points. Edward the Confessor wore a crown like a helmet and also a plain diadem, one inch in width, surrounded with fleur-de-lis. It is recorded that Richard's first crown was so large and heavy that it had to be supported on his head by two of his courtiers.

The sceptres used by the ancient British kings were surmounted with crosses, fleur-de-lis or birds. The present one, including the cross, is of pure gold, and is a few inches less than three feet in length. Its shaft is set with emeralds, rubies and diamonds. Near its head are three golden oak leaves bearing a rose, a thistle and a shamrock. A globular amethyst, set with jewels and surmounted by a jeweled Maltese cross, is at the top. The sceptre is, of course, emblematic of the authority to rule. The queen's sceptre resembles the king's, closely, but is smaller.

Among the other "crown jewels" in use in a coronation may be mentioned the St. Edward's staff which is always before the sovereign at the coronation ceremony. It is approximately four and one-half feet in length and is surmounted by a cross and mound, the latter of which is supposed to contain a piece of the cross in Calvary. This mound, or globe, signifies supreme political authority.

Four state swords—one of "Mercy," the second of "State," the third of "Temporal Justice," and the fourth of "Ecclesiastical Justice"—are also borne before the king at his coronation. The "Ampulla," a golden vessel in the form of a bird with outstretched wings, contains the anointing oil, and the golden spurs on the altar, are symbolic of knighthood. The coronation ring is of plain gold, set with a large flat ruby and a St. George's cross.

After the anointing, he dons successively garments known as the amice, the cote of lawn, the stole and the royal dalmatic. This latter is a magnificent robe of cloth of gold. After the ceremony the monarch appears in his royal robe of ermine and purple velvet.



MARY VII WAS CROWNED ON A BATTLEFIELD



EDWARD THE CONFESSOR GAVE THE BEGGAR A RING