

VIII.

THE INAUGURATION OF ALEXANDER III. BY MISS M. D. LEGGE.

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The history of the knowledge of the French language in Scotland may be conveniently divided into four periods: Early Mediæval, "the Edwards in Scotland," the Auld Alliance, and modern times. Of these, the third is naturally the best known; the first is hardly known at all. Yet the unfortunate term "Norman-French" occurs sufficiently often in record publications to warrant an investigation. Meantime there is one small but cherished piece of evidence which can and must be exposed as a piece of fiction.

"The Bishop of St Andrews," wrote E. W. Robertson,¹ "at the coronation of Alexander III translated the Latin formulas into French, a useless expenditure of trouble had not that been the language with which the youthful prince was best acquainted." And George Grub points a moral when telling the same story²: "At the coronation, that language alone was

¹ *Scotland Under Her Early Kings* (Edinburgh, 1862), vol. ii. p. 143 n.

² *Ecclesiastical History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1861), vol. i. p. 326.

wanting, which was spoken by the most influential of Alexander's subjects, and which was soon to be predominant throughout the kingdom." Both these writers belong to an elder generation of historians, but their works are still read, and this particular legend has become generally accepted and is being repeated even in our own day.¹

On the face of it the story is not impossible. Alexander was only eight, and his mother was a Frenchwoman. Robertson gives his authority for the details of the coronation, and he states it to be Fordun.² At Scone, according to this source, the Bishop of St Andrews anointed the boy, girded him with the sword of knighthood, administered the oath to him "*prius Latine postea Gallice*," and crowned him in the Abbey church before leading him outside to the Stone, where he received the homage of the nobles, and a Highlander recited the traditional pedigree in Gaelic, as depicted in the famous miniature in Corpus Christi Cambridge MS. 171.

Unfortunately, his source was not the real Fordun, and the growth and flourishing of this legend are proof of the need for critical texts, and for the minute scrutiny of the details from which a general historical picture is made up. What Robertson cited as Fordun is what is commonly called the "Scotichronicon," Goodall's edition of 1759, which is Fordun rewritten by Bower. Until Skene published the first volume of the *Historians of Scotland* in 1871, this was the only easily accessible text of the chronicle, and indeed for some purposes it has never been superseded. Skene disentangled Fordun from later accretions, but Andrew Gillman's intention of producing a critical text of these accretions never bore fruit, and one is still awaited. In 1869 Skene had already printed in parallel columns the account as Fordun had left it in 1385 and as Bower had recast it in 1447, in an appendix to his treatise on the Coronation Stone.³ Further criticism of Bower's trustworthiness as an historian may be found in Sir H. Maxwell's *Early Chronicles Relating to Scotland*.⁴

It must be remembered that even Fordun was writing more than a hundred years after the event, and that no records are extant by which his account can be checked. It is true that Sir James Balfour possessed what purports to be an account of the coronation, but Lord Bute was probably right in dismissing this as late invention.⁵ Balfour has been called "one of our most industrious antiquarians, but, alas! also one of our least trustworthy."⁶ It is hardly possible that he could have inherited, as Lord Lyon, any written record of such antiquity, and he may have

¹ E.g. J. Fergusson, *Alexander III* (London, 1937), p. 28; Agnes Mure Mackenzie, *The Foundations of Scotland* (London and Edinburgh, 1938), pp. 107, 219.

² *Op. cit.*, vol. ii. p. 54.

³ Edinburgh, 1869.

⁴ (Glasgow, 1912), pp. 231-4.

⁵ John, Third Marquess of Bute, *Scottish Coronations* (Paisley and London, 1902), p. 67.

⁶ J. Maitland Thomson, *The Public Records of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1922), p. 139.

derived the account from a chronicle. Maidment published it in 1837,¹ but Balfour may not have regarded it as authentic. It has every appearance of being an inflated version of Bower.

Fordun's account does at least make sense. It was, as Skene was desirous of showing, the last traditional inauguration of a King of Scots. Everything took place out of doors. The Bishop of St Andrews "consecrated" the King, whatever that may mean, but the essential act, as Fordun expressly points out, was the placing of the King upon the Stone. This was followed by the homage and the recital of the genealogy by the Sennachie. In fact, it reads like an account of the old tribal inauguration blessed by the presence of a bishop. All the available lore of the rite was summed up in the form drawn up for Charles I's coronation by the then Lord Lyon, Sir Jerome Lindsay of Annatland, which was not adopted. This form² is sufficiently like other Western coronations to be misleading at first sight. Crowning, anointing, and so on have become an integral part of the ceremony, and the Stone is absent. But certain peculiarities survive: the inauguration is still there, and the Lord Lyon has inherited the Sennachie's office of genealogist.³ The ceremony has become an amalgamation of the tribal inauguration conception and the Christian and feudalised coronation. The process of this amalgamation and assimilation was gradual: it is difficult to trace the exact stages by which it was accomplished. In the time of Alexander III it had hardly begun.

One of the main differences between Fordun and Bower is that the former recognised the fact that Alexander, the last King of the old line, was likely to come to the throne with an old-fashioned ceremony, while the latter did not. This, however, was not the only reason why both Fordun and Bower thought it necessary to describe this inauguration in detail.

It was the first, but not unfortunately the last, occasion on which the heir to the throne was an infant. In former times, the age at which a king could assume personal government was not fixed, and varied according to the circumstances. In Britain it was sometimes as early as fourteen, sometimes as late as twenty. Conditions made it advisable to consider James V as being of age at twelve, though he remained in semi-tutelage for two further years. Alexander, however, was only eight. Apart from the obvious inconvenience of this fact, both Fordun and Bower were steeped in English history and doubtless intended their books to be read abroad, where Alexander's accession would excite more interest than it did at home. "Woe

¹ *Ancient Heraldic and Antiquarian Tracts* (Edinburgh, 1837), p. 32. Cf. *Nat. Lib. MSS.*, 33.2.26, 33.7.10.

² *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, Second Series (1627-8), vol. ii. p. 393 ss.

³ See the article on "Heraldic Law" by Thomas Innes of Learney, Albany Herald, in *Sources and Literature of Scots Law* (Stair Society, 1936), pp. 381-3; also his chapter in "The Times" book, *Crown and Empire* (London, 1937), and "Diploma of Nobility for De Landa," *Juridical Review*, vol. lii., No. 3, p. 181. Cf. "Heraldica," "Heraldry and War-Leadership," *Notes and Queries*, August 15, 1942, p. 92 ss.

to the land where the King is a child" was a text quoted with real meaning in the Middle Ages. The principle of primogeniture was only slowly establishing itself. It was not long since John had successfully placed himself on the English throne, and few were found to urge the claims of his nephew Arthur. The Capetians down to Philip Augustus took the precaution of crowning their eldest sons in their own lifetimes,¹ an extreme form of Tanistry which was copied by Henry II in the case of the son known for ever as the Young King. The situation in Scotland was not so dangerous. According to Fordun, the Royal order of succession had been clearly laid down on a new principle, that of nearness of blood, by Malcolm MacKenneth (1005-34).² Express mention is made of the fact that a babe a day old was not to be excluded. Thus both Alexander III and, what is much more remarkable, the Maid of Norway were held to be the undisputed heirs of their father and grandfather respectively, though it is perhaps only fair to add that there was no one near enough in blood to feel a grievance, and the principle had often been violated in early times.³

Alexander, then, succeeded to the throne. The next difficulty which had to be faced was that of his inauguration. Elsewhere, it had not yet been determined whether a king began his reign from the moment of his accession or only from that of his coronation. In France, for this reason, coronations of minors came to be deferred until the close of the Regency, and the early age of fourteen was fixed for their majority. In spite of the efforts of successive kings to break the tradition, it held good for the last coronation of a minor, that of Louis XV, which was delayed for seven years.⁴ In Spain there is a faint possibility that Enrique III of Castile had two coronations, one after his accession and another when he came of age.⁵ In England the problem was soon to present itself in a peculiar form. Edward I was abroad when his father died, and there was no possibility of an early coronation, but he was of age and the succession was not in dispute. It was therefore decided to date his reign from his father's funeral.⁶

There was, therefore, every reason why Alexander should be proclaimed King as soon as possible. It was the traditional thing to do, and it would have a steadying effect both at home and abroad. However, yet another difficulty arose. Alexander had neither uncle nor great-uncle who could be associated with him,⁷ and a quarrel about who was to govern in his name was

¹ A. Luchaire, *Histoire des Institutions monarchiques de la France sous les premiers Capétiens*, 2^e edition (Paris, 1891), lib. i. cap. 11.

² *Fordun*, vol. i. p. 172; vol. ii. p. 164.

³ Cf. *Crown and Empire*, p. 90, and the Introduction to the translation of Skene's *Fordun*.

⁴ See especially M. Menin, *Treatise of the Anointing and Coronation of the Kings of France* (English trans. London, 1723), and D. Godefroy, *Le Cérémonial François* (Paris, 1649).

⁵ M. D. Legge, *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions* (Oxford, 1941), p. 184.

⁶ *Rishanger's Chronicle* (Rolls Series), p. 75; cf. Stubbs, vol. ii. p. 111.

⁷ For the question of minors and joint-reigns, see Thomas Innes of Learney, *The Tartans of the Clans and Families of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, 1938), p. 47, n. 4.

a foregone conclusion. The chief rivals were Comyn and Durward. According to Fordun, Durward tried to postpone the inauguration, saying that the boy must first be knighted, and that the knighting could not take place at once, because the day was unlucky. Comyn suspected him of wishing to knight the King himself, which would automatically have made him appear the most important person present, and he declared that "he had seen a king consecrated who was not yet a knight and had many a time heard of kings being consecrated who were not knights." This argument carried the day, and Alexander was straightway led outside to the Stone. The ceremony already described followed. Bower diminishes the part played by Comyn, and says that the quarrel was settled by the Bishop of St Andrews knighting the King. There are two points of interest here: the first, why the question of knighthood was raised; the second, why Fordun and Bower differ.

The exact relationship between knighthood and kingship has never been defined, and of course kingship is immeasurably the older conception. The ceremonies of knighthood and coronation are, however, so alike that confusion was inevitable. Moreover, as chivalry ceased to become a real thing and became more and more the conventional framework of society, it would have been awkward if the King could not take his place as *primus inter pares* with his fellow-knights. So, in writing of the fourteenth century, Sir James Ramsay goes so far as to call knighthood an "indispensible preliminary" to coronation.¹ Now, as will presently appear, this association of knighthood and coronation seems to have been well on its way to being an accomplished fact in the thirteenth century, and if the matter was really brought up in the case of Alexander III, it shows that men were beginning to think of the Scottish inauguration as a feudal ceremony, feudal, that is, in the Anglo-French sense.

Few minors, at least in early times when the knight was first and foremost a fighting-man, had been knighted, and in the case of princes delay was sometimes caused by the fact that it was customary, though it never became obligatory, for a future king to be knighted by a reigning monarch. Comyn appealed to history in support of his contention that a king could be consecrated before being knighted. Only one such case in Scottish history would be known to him. He, or Fordun, was probably thinking of Malcolm the Maiden, who was knighted by Henry II at or near Tours six years after he became king.² Alexander II was only sixteen when he came to the throne, but he had been knighted by John at Clerkenwell two years before.³ Curiously enough, both Alexander III's contemporaries in England and

¹ *Genesis of Lancaster* (Oxford, 1913), vol. i. p. 184.

² *Fordun*, vol. i. p. 255; vol. ii. p. 250.

³ *Cal. Docs. Rel. Scot.*, vol. i. p. 90 (No. 518); cf. footnote, p. 134, to M. O. Anderson, *Chronicle of Holyrood* (Scottish History Society).

France had come to the throne as minors in troubled times, and in both cases the question of knighthood was raised and settled in a way that was hardly helpful to Comyn. According to one chronicler, whom there is no reason to doubt, a halt was made on St Louis's journey to his coronation at Rheims so that he could be knighted at Soissons.¹ And in spite of the obvious dangers, Henry III's coronation was delayed so that William Marshal could knight him. This detail is not of record, but is reported in the Marshal's life, which is good authority.²

It was indeed best to ignore the circumstances of Henry III's coronation at Gloucester, for they were considered so irregular that he had to undergo the ceremony a second time at Westminster with a real crown.³ This marks an interesting distinction between the Scottish and English ceremonies. In Scotland, however inadequate the inaugural ceremony may have appeared to foreigners, it remained a proclamation of the fact of accession, a fact which no circumstances could alter. In England, when Richard I purchased his release from a humiliating captivity by doing homage for his kingdom to the Emperor, it was felt necessary to wipe away this disgrace by a second coronation.⁴ But the question of a second coronation could not and did not arise in the case of William the Lion, nor did it in the later case of David II, and it was only mistrust that inspired Parliament to require him to renew part of his coronation oath.⁵ Neither the Bruces nor John Baliol could be described as men steeped in Scottish tradition, yet there is evidence that they were influenced by it. It is clear that the two principal claimants took expert advice when their claims were prepared in 1291-2, for both claims were based on different interpretations of Scottish custom. Tradition may account for what appears to be a genuine difference of opinion which both Robert I and John Baliol had in turn with Edward I on the sanctity of the Scottish coronation. To Edward, this was an empty form, to be disregarded at will; to the others, an irrevocable act, a kind of sacrament, after which their views on their position and dignity were never the same again. If any explanation other than that of convenience is needed for the fact that Mary in her own person is sometimes described as "the Princess" even after her coronation to distinguish her from her mother,⁶ it is probably to be found in the strong French influence naturally prevailing at that date.

When all these factors have been considered, it will be seen that Fordun's account of Alexander III's inauguration rings true—the accession, the

¹ Willelmi Chronica Andrensis, *Monumenta Germanica, Scriptores*, vol. xxiv. p. 766.

² *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, ed. P. Meyer (Paris, 1891-1901), II. 15308 and following.

³ Walter of Coventry (Rolls Series), vol. ii. p. 244; cf. P. E. Schramm, *History of the English Coronation*, tr. L. S. Wickham-Legg (Oxford, 1937), pp. 39, 44-5, 59, 163-4.

⁴ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora* (Rolls Series), vol. ii. p. 404; cf. Schramm, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9, 234-5.

⁵ *Acts Parl. Scot.*, vol. i. p. 134.

⁶ *E.g.* in the *Lord High Treasurer's Accounts*.

proposal to inaugurate, the objection based on newfangled ideas and its rejection, and the ceremony based on Celtic tradition of immemorial antiquity. Skene held that Bower deliberately substituted a coronation of the conventional type. If this is so, it is not necessary to be too hard on Bower. In his day, the great anointing controversy had at last been settled, the Stone was at Westminster, and the Scottish monarchs were now crowned with rites which superficially at least closely resembled those in use in England or in France. Bower may have been desirous of enhancing Alexander's position as an independent monarch by representing him as having been crowned in this style, or he may simply be guilty of anachronism.

The possibility that Bower may have been using sources which have since disappeared with so many other records cannot altogether be excluded, but, for reasons which have already been given, Fordun's account is to be preferred in the light of what we now possess. A possible clue to his sources is provided by Bower himself. If he wished to give a conventional picture of a king being crowned, he would of course try to get rid of any suggestion of irregularity and, as Abbot of Inchcolm, he would tend to stress the ecclesiastical side of the ceremony. And this is what he seems to have done. Fordun barely mentions the Bishop of St Andrews, while Bower assigns him an important part. Bower describes the knighthood controversy, but says that it was settled not by Comyn but by the Bishop.

Time had provided Bower with a number of precedents to supplement his imagination. He himself relates the knighting of two later Scottish boy-kings. David II is said to have been knighted at his coronation by the Guardian, and to have himself immediately knighted the Earl of Angus and young Randolph.¹ David's own knighthood is not of record, but that of the others is,² and may be deemed to postulate the King's. James II had been knighted with his elder twin brother at their baptism.³ This detail is not of record, but Bower is here contemporary, and this was probably the current practice. Apparently James I received knighthood at the hands of Henry V in 1421,⁴ but the fact that he was then received into the Order of the Garter does not really rule out the possibility of his being already a knight. In the very full account (based on a contemporary broadsheet) of the baptism of Prince Henry at Stirling in 1594 in Nisbet's *System of Heraldry*,⁵ it is said that he was dubbed knight by the King, and was touched with the spur by the Earl of Mar immediately after his baptism and before the ducal crown was placed on his head. The Lord Lyon then proclaimed his style.

The idea of knighting a prince at his baptism is believed to have originated in France. Enguerrand de Monstrelet declares that Louis XI was

¹ Goodall, vol. ii. p. 302.

² *Cal. Exchequer Rolls*, vol. i. p. 398.

³ Goodall, vol. ii. p. 490.

⁴ E. W. M. Balfour-Melville, *James I, King of Scots* (London, 1936), p. 84.

⁵ Vol. ii., ed. Robert Fleming (Edinburgh, 1742), p. 161.

knighted at his own request just before his coronation: "Qi fut vne nouvelle chose Car lon dist comunement que tous les filz des roys de france sont cheualiers sur les fons a leur baptesme."¹ Monstrelet's authority for this assertion is not known.² Nisbet (*op. cit.*, p. 87) says: "And tho' it is said the Sons of the French King are Knights as soon as they receive Baptism, yet are they not judged worthy of the Kingdom, unless first solemnly created; and we elsewhere find that the Royal Heirs of Aragon were suspended from the Crown, until they had received the Honour of Knighthood." This refers to the fact that later Kings of France were received into an Order of Chivalry at their coronation. It should be noted that Louis IX, whose knighting is mentioned above, was only the grandson of a King of France. Before leaving this subject, Arthur Young's contemptuous reference to the Cordon Bleu as a blue slobbering bib may be recalled.

In England, this association of knighthood and baptism seems never to have taken hold. Nevertheless, Bower had two examples to consider. Edward III came to the throne unexpectedly early, on his father's deposition, and he was knighted before his coronation by either his cousin, Henry of Lancaster, or John of Hainault.³ The future Richard II had been created a Knight of the Garter shortly before the death of Edward III, as part of the campaign by Gaunt's enemies, it is interesting to note, to ensure his succession to the throne.⁴

Bower, however, preferred to make the knighting an integral part of his coronation. The Bishop of St Andrews, he says, knighted the King "*ad modum Willelmi Rufi regis Angliae, militaribus insigniti a Lanfranco Cantuarie Archiepiscopo, et ab eodem coronati: pro quo vide supra, Lib. VII. cap. xxxj. et infra cap. iv.*"⁵ The source of both Fordun and Bower for the reign of Rufus is William of Malmesbury (known to Bower through the medium of Helinandus), whence this detail is derived. When Bower comes to the actual knighting of Alexander by Henry III he is fain to explain away the earlier ceremony. As a matter of fact, he was right upon both counts, only he cannot have it both ways. It is true that the higher clergy could and did make knights,⁶ but it is also true that the coronation sword is not the sword of knighthood, though they are similar in origin and in symbolism. The former plays its accustomed part in both England and Scotland at the coronations of infants and Queens Regnant.

¹ Verard's ed. (Paris, sixteenth century), vol. ii. f. ccxviii.

² Selden, *Titles of Honor* (2nd ed. 1631), p. 548.

³ Walsingham (Rolls Series), vol. i. p. 188; Bridlington, *Chronicles of Edward I and II* (Rolls Series), vol. ii. p. 95.

⁴ Walsingham, vol. i. p. 326.

⁵ Goodall, vol. ii. p. 81; *cf.* vol. i. p. 409, vol. ii. p. 84.

⁶ See not only Malmesbury (Rolls Series), vol. ii. p. 360, but the *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. vi. pp. 801-2, and L. Gautier, *La Chevalerie* (Paris, 1895), p. 265.

Thus it was used at the coronation of James VI, who was one year old,¹ and at that of the nine months old Queen Mary.²

It is therefore reasonable to deduce, from Bower's general tendency and from this cross-reference supplied by himself, that if this version of Alexander's inauguration is his invention, he had the English coronation ceremony in mind. From that he would derive the crowning and anointing, and from that his remarkable statement about the oath. Very little is known about the mediæval coronation oath of Scotland, and what it was like before the insertion of the heretic clause. The part referring to Crown lands is of record in 1357.³ For later records the references were collected by William Bell in his work on the Regalia of Scotland.⁴ The oath was formerly taken in Latin and later in English. Bower's own king, James II, is believed to have taken it in English, for copies of it exist, though none of them is of record. The matter is complicated by the fact that until the Reformation there does not seem to have been a fixed form for the oath. At least that is what Lindsay concluded from the records now lost. "Whill the crowne is on the Kings head the King promises by oath takin by the bishops to be a loving father to the people in the words that the bishops thinkes good. Bot now the forme of oath is sett down be a speciall act of Parliament made be King James of ever blessed memorie, First Parliament, cap. 8."⁵ Lindsay evidently knew that the oath went back to something belonging to a primitive society. His remark about the "words that the bishops thinkes good" would cover Bower, but a consideration of what was happening in England will strengthen the suspicion that he was looking beyond the Border.

The language of the English coronation oath has been the subject of much recent investigation. Until the last few years the idea that it was administered in Latin, but that a French form available for an "illiterate" king was employed at Edward II's coronation, was generally prevalent. In 1936 Mr H. G. Richardson and Dr G. O. Sayles pointed out that there were no real grounds for pillorying Edward II in this way,⁶ and in 1941 Mr Richardson returned to the charge,⁷ adding that the French form was employed quite as much for the benefit of his subjects as for that of the King, that it was probably in use before 1308, and that the misunderstanding had arisen through the choice of text by the editors of Statutes of the Realm. The fault, therefore, lies with the writer of that text, but he was not alone

¹ *Reg. of the Privy Council of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 542.

² *Hamilton Papers*, vol. ii. p. 39. Cf. for the whole question, Schramm, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-4.

³ Cf. note 26.

⁴ Bannatyne Club, 1829, p. 25.

⁵ *Loc. cit.*, p. 394.

⁶ "Early Coronation Records I," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. xiii. (1935-6), esp. p. 140.

⁷ "The English Coronation Oath," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 1941

in mediæval times in his confusion. Mr Richardson and Dr Sayles describe fourteenth-century copies of the coronation service, in which the oath is given in Latin followed by the French version, which was mistaken for a translation of the Latin, whereas it seems to have been of independent origin. At the time when Bower was writing there had been no English coronation for about fifteen years, so that the ceremony would not be fresh in men's minds. If he got hold of some written account, and interpreted, as well he might, some such rubric as "*Translacio eiusdem sacramenti in Gallicum*" to mean that the oath was first recited by the Archbishop in Latin, like the rest of the service, and then actually administered in French, he would naturally be led to say what he does.

It may never be possible to clear this matter up completely, but at any rate there is a case to answer, and Bower cannot be regarded as a reliable authority. Fordun, on the other hand, though he had his faults, stands out as a really great historian. Two major desiderata have enlarged the scope of this textual inquiry: a really sound, full-length history of the Scottish coronations¹ and a comprehensive study of the coronation of minors. The main lesson which emerges is the need for good texts, and for the critical interpretation of texts. A clear distinction is not always drawn between what is matter of record and what is merely matter of report. Had Schramm, for instance, been more careful in this respect, his few remarks on Scotland would have been more acceptable. "What the chronicler said" is not evidence.

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¹ To the books and articles already mentioned should be added the Rev. Professor Cooper, "Four Scottish Coronations," *Transactions of the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society* (Special Issue, Aberdeen, 1902), who takes a different line from Lord Bute.