

THE BANQUETING HOUSE OF THE PALACE OF WHITEHALL.

BY

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I AM glad to have the privilege of meeting you this afternoon in this noble old Banqueting House, practically the last remaining portion of the Palace of Whitehall—so closely identified with the House of Stuart, alike in its prosperity and in its misfortunes—which happily was spared by the great fire which destroyed nearly all the other buildings in its vicinity in 1698.

The present edifice was built in 1619 by James I.—whose bust by Le Sueur is to be seen at the head of the staircase—upon or near the site of a former banqueting house, from the design of Inigo Jones; and the pictures forming the ceiling, representing the apotheosis of his father, and other subjects, were painted for Charles I. by Peter Paul Rubens.

The fact that the latter unfortunate monarch passed through the Banqueting Hall on his way to the scaffold on the memorable January 30th, 1649, has completely overshadowed in the public mind all the other events that have taken place within its historic walls; but the circumstances of that tragic day have been so fully written about that one need not do more than allude to them now.

During the reign of James I. masques and other scenes of revelry took place in the Banqueting Hall, as also was the case in the happiest days of Charles I.; but then came the Civil War and the Commonwealth, and with the latter a period of unutterable dulness and gloom out of deference to the views of the then dominant extreme Puritans, so graphically described by Lord Macaulay.

Early in 1657 came the attempt of Miles Sindercomb, a cashiered quartermaster, to burn Whitehall, with the object of trying to kill the Protector during the confusion that would ensue. This plot failed, and on Friday, January 23rd, the Parliament—with the Speaker, Sir Thomas Widdrington, at its head—went to the Banqueting House to congratulate His Highness upon his escape. Carlyle mentions “that in passing from the Court up to the Banqueting-House, ‘part of an ancient wooden staircase,’ or balustrade of a staircase, ‘long exposed to the weather, gave way in the crowding’; and some honourable gentlemen had falls, though happily nobody was seriously hurt.”

In the same year the Parliament, by a majority, decided to offer the Crown to Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector, and, accordingly, on March 31st, Speaker Widdrington, attended by the whole House, repaired to Whitehall, and here, in the Banqueting Hall, presented to His Highness “The Humble Petition and Advice of the Parliament of England, Scotland, and Ireland” that he should accept the title of King; and subsequent negotiations were carried on in the same place. On the following 8th of May this hall was the scene of Cromwell’s rejection of the Crown.

In view of Cromwell’s association in life with the Banqueting Hall, it is only fitting that his sword should be preserved among the exhibits here. This weapon, which bears the marks of two musket balls, was used by him

when he personally led the final assault on Tredah (now known as Drogheda), in Ireland, on September 12th, 1649.

In 1660 came the Restoration, and Charles II., upon his arrival in London from exile on May 29th of that year, was received at Whitehall by both Houses of Parliament, who offered, in the name of the nation, their congratulations and allegiance—the Lords being in the Drawing Room and the Commons in the Banqueting Hall. Thenceforth the Palace with its Banqueting Hall was once more the scene of mirth and revelry, much accentuated by the inevitable reaction from the deadly dulness of the Protectorate; and also of State functions. It was in this hall that Charles II. received the Lords and Commons on March 1st, 1682, prior to the arrival of the Queen (Catherine of Braganza).

Curing the King's Evil, or scrofula, by touching of the Sovereign, is said to date back from the time of Edward the Confessor, although the public ceremony in connection therewith is only traced from the reign of Edward III.

John Evelyn says in his diary on July 6th, 1660:—“His Majesty began *first to touch for the evil*, according to the costume, thus: his Majestie sitting under his State in the Banqueting House, the Chirurgeons cause the sick to be brought or led up to the throne, where they kneeling, the King strokes their faces or cheekes with both his hands at once, at which instant a Chaplaine in his formalities says: ‘He put his hands upon them and healed them.’ This is sayd to every one in particular. When they have been all touch’d they come up againe in the same order, and the other Chaplaine kneeling, and having an Angel gold strung on white ribbon on his arme, delivers them one by one to his Majestie, who puts them about the necks of the touched as they passe, whilst the first Chaplaine repeats: ‘That is the true light who came into the world.’ Then follows an Epistle (as at first a Gospell) with the

Liturgy, prayers for the sick, with some alteration, lastly the blessing; and the Lo. Chamberlaine and Comptroller of the Household bring a basin, ewer and towell for his Majestie to wash."

Samuel Pepys, under June 23rd, 1660, says:—"To my Lord's (the Earl of Sandwich) lodgings where Tom Guy come to me, and there staid to see the King touch people for the King's Evil. But he did not come at all, it rayned so; and the poor people were forced to stand all the morning in the rain in the garden. Afterward he touched them in the banqueting-house."

Under the date of April 13th, 1661, Pepys records:—"Met my Lord with the Duke (of York); and after a little talk with him, I went to the Banquet-house, and there saw the King heale, the first time that I ever saw him do it; which he did with great gravity, and it seemed to me to be an ugly office and a simple one."

William III. is only known to have touched one person, and the ceremony appears to have died out in the reign of Queen Anne.

¹ With respect to touching for the King's Evil, Macaulay says:—"The Stuarts frequently dispensed the healing influence in the Banqueting House. The days on which this miracle was to be wrought were fixed at sittings of the Privy Council, and were solemnly notified by the clergy in all the parish churches of the realm. . . . Theologians of eminent learning, ability, and virtue gave the sanction of their authority to this mummery; and what is stranger still, medical men of high note believed, or affected to believe, in the balsamic virtues of the royal hand. . . . More than one of the surgeons who attended Charles the Second has left us a solemn profession of faith in the King's miraculous power. One of them is not ashamed to tell us. . . . that Charles once handled a scrofulous Quaker and made him a healthy man and a sound Churchman in a moment. . . . The crowds which repaired to the palace on the days of healing were immense; Charles the Second, in the course of his reign, touched near a hundred thousand persons. . . . In 1682 he performed the rite eight thousand five hundred times. In 1684 the throng was such that six or seven of the sick were trampled to death. James, in one of his progresses, touched eight hundred persons in the choir of the Cathedral of Chester."

Another description of ceremony is mentioned by Pepys as follows, on April 20th, 1661:—"And so went away to White Hall; and in the Banqueting-house saw the King create my Lord Chancellor and several others, Earles, and Mr. Crewe and several others, Barons: the first being led up by Heralds and five old Earles to the King, and there the patent is read, and the King puts on his vest, and sword, and coronett, and gives him the patent. And then he kisseth the King's hand, and rises and stands covered before the King. And the same for each Baron, only he is led by three of the old Barons. And they are girt with swords before they go to the King."

The Banqueting Hall was also closely identified with the Most Noble Order of the Garter²—for Evelyn tells us on April 22nd, 1667:—"Saw the sumptuous supper in the Banqueting House at White-hall on the eve of St. George's Day, where were all the Companions of the Order of the Garter," and he goes on to describe the ensuing ceremonies, which extended over the following day.

I have not noticed any account of functions that may have taken place in the Banqueting Hall during the short reign of James II.; but the weathercock placed by his orders on the building, so that he might observe from his own apartment whether or not the wind was favourable for the enterprize of his son-in-law, the Prince of Orange, still retains its place.

Here it was that William and Mary accepted the Crown of England in 1688, and after their Coronation in 1689 the House of Commons came to Whitehall and kissed Their Majesties' hands in the Banqueting Hall. Here, too, in 1689, William and Mary accepted the Crown of Scotland and took the oath of office after the Scotch fashion.

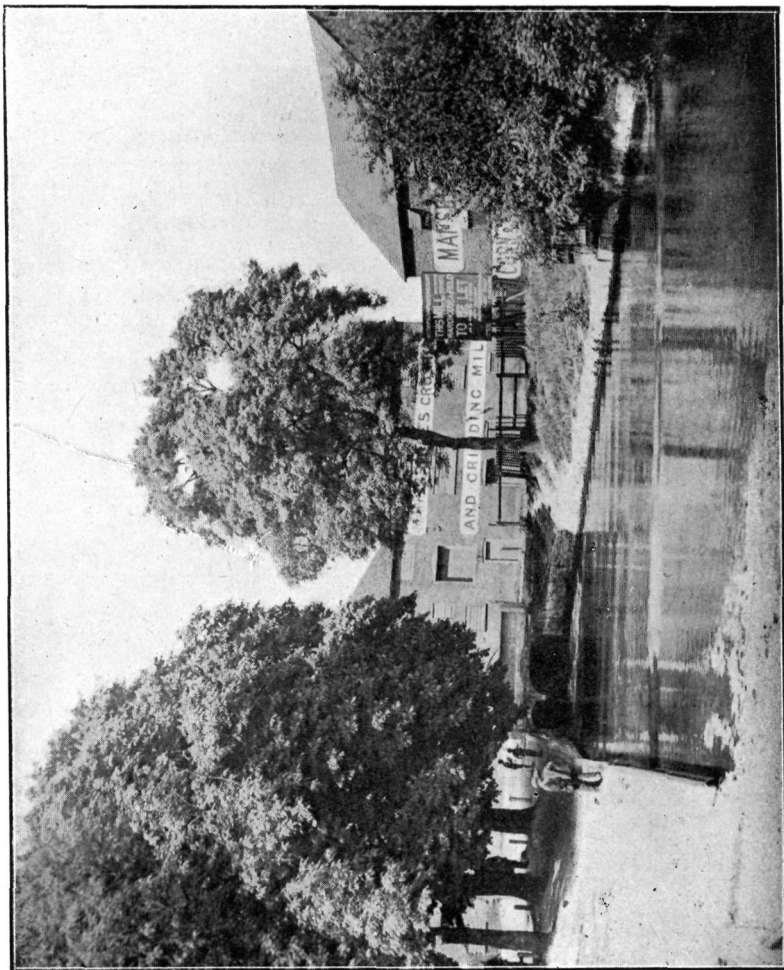
² Charles I. at one time proposed to have its history illustrated on the walls.

In 1724 the Banqueting Hall was converted into a Chapel Royal (although it was never consecrated), the opening ceremony being attended by George I.

Between 1811 and 1816 captured French Eagles and colours were deposited in the chapel with solemn religious service and much military pomp. However, one of the former, known as "The Eagle with the Golden Wreath," was stolen, and the others were subsequently transferred to the Royal Hospital at Chelsea.

In 1895 the Museum of the Royal United Service Institution was removed from Whitehall Yard to the Chapel Royal, Whitehall, which then resumed its name of Banqueting House.

I have only spoken about the Banqueting House, but you should carefully study the beautiful model, constructed in accordance with various engravings and plans, of the Palace of Whitehall, as a whole, as it existed in the days of Charles I., the generous and valuable gift of Lieut.-Colonel Sir Arthur Leetham, Secretary of the Institution and Curator of the Museum.



THE OLD FOUND MILL, STAINES.