

## THE STONE OF DESTINY.

IN July, 1924, Mr. Kirkwood, Member of Parliament, asked for leave to bring in a Bill to provide for the removal of the Scottish Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey to Holyrood Palace, Edinburgh.

Incidentally he "said that according to tradition this was the stone that Jacob had for a pillow at Bethel, when he was flying before his brother Esau, as the result of his having stolen Esau's birthright. It was taken by Jacob's family into Egypt, or, according to the Bible at that time, into the land of Goshen, and it was in the possession of the Kings of Egypt for a considerable time. It was taken from Egypt to Ireland; it was on Tara's Hill 700 years B.C. That was according to tradition; he did not know whether it was true or not. What he did know was that the stone was Scottish sandstone. It lay at Scone for about 500 years until there was a quarrel betwixt Bruce and Baliol, and Edward I., called "the Hammer of Scotland," was brought in to arbitrate betwixt the two. Edward went to Scotland as arbiter and called in all the evidence, searched all the archives of Scotland, and took all these with him to England along with the stone, according to Professor Innes's "Ancient Inhabitants of Scotland." . . . . The stone was a symbol of Scottish nationhood. It was a venerable relic and Scotland had tried time and time again to get that venerable stone returned to Scottish soil. Edward thought in 1296 that he had completely conquered Scotland, that he had hammered the nationhood out of that country, which he never did, because he stood there to-day representing an unconquered race. . . . . By the Treaty of Northampton in 1328—and this was where their honour would come in—the stone and other relics should have been restored to Scotland. The reason given for the stone's not being returned was that the sentiment of London was against it. . . . . They

cherished the great spiritual, historical and sentimental bonds that bound the race together, for the mere material things of life were alone but as bread that turned to dust and ashes in the mouth. Those were the materialists who jeered and sneered at the demand of a nation for the ownership and custody of the symbol of its nationhood." Leave to bring in the Bill was given. (*The Times*, 16 July, 1924).

Concerning the stone, Dean Stanley, half a century ago, after setting out various considerations, said: "1. The Stone is certainly from Scotland, probably from Scone. 2. Comparing its present size (26 inches long by  $16\frac{1}{3}$  broad, and  $10\frac{1}{2}$  deep) with the description of the Scottish Chroniclers, *una magna petra-pergrandis lapis* ' and 'rounded into the form of a chair,' it would seem to have been reduced to meet the requirements of the new chair of Edward I., and hence perhaps the marks of chiselling on its surface " (*Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey* [1869] p. 596 note).

A wood-cut of the stone detached from the Chair was given by Dean Stanley (*ibid.* p. 588), the wood-cut also showing the attached chains and rings which perhaps were employed for slinging the stone when it was being carried by an army on the march. It is probable that the illustration was made from the photograph, for the taking of which the stone was removed from its chair. The negative according to arrangement was handed over to the Dean after the photograph had been taken. There is a crack in the stone which threatens its severance.

As regards the origin and markings upon the Stone, the Rev. H. F. Westlake, M.V.O., F.S.A., Custodian of the Abbey has kindly favoured us with the following:—

"Short of an actual desecration of the stone by taking a chip from it, it is probable that no sufficient geological pronouncement as to its origin could now be made. Each may believe the particular legend that most appeals to him. Some notes, however, on a recent examination of its top face may be of interest. These were made possible by a cleaning of the chair and the consequent sliding-out of the wooden

seat usually retained in place by two modern strips of wood. At the north and south ends are rectangular sinkings made to contain the iron rings to which are attached chains bolted into the middle of the vertical north and south faces. It seems probable that these rings and chains belong to the time of Edward I., and were so placed to allow of a pole to be passed through the rings for purposes of transportation since the rings show evidence of a lateral swing such as would be thus caused.

More interesting are the markings on the top face which are clearly of earlier date, since at one end the rectangular sinking cuts into them. This surface has an incised rectangle cut into it as if it were intended to make the stone—or actually made it—the plinth for some superstructure such as the shaft of a cross. This rectangle is about 17 inches by 9 inches and has been enlarged to the north by another narrow rectangle the adjacent sides of the two not quite coinciding, suggesting that the first cutting was not quite accurate for its purpose. About the middle of the western edge of the top surface is a roughly cut Latin cross, the longer bar of which runs north and south. The existence of this cross suggests that the surrounds of the rectangle have not been cut away so as to level the surface, or if cut away that the cross was added at a later date. Any conclusions with regard to these markings must necessarily be only a matter of conjecture.”

To alleviate misgiving, the Editor desires to point out that the Stone of Destiny still faithfully reposes beneath the seat of the Coronation Chair at the Abbey.

By the kind and express permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office, we are enabled to reproduce the photograph of the Coronation Stone as it appears (Plate 5) in the Westminster Abbey Volume of the Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. In the photograph, the markings to which Mr. Westlake refers can be clearly seen.

W.M.