

II.

NOTE ON THE CORONATION STONE. BY JOHN STUART, Esq., LL.D. SEC. S.A. SCOT.

After a recent consideration of the very curious account which Mr Skene has given, in his "Chronicles of the Picts and Scots," of the invention of lists of early Scottish kings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the varying shape which the national claims to remote antiquity assumed in the course of the English claims to a supremacy over Scotland, I became convinced that, as these were shown by Mr Skene to have been historical fables suggested by political necessities, so the celebrated stone of destiny was part of the same fabric, and that its legendary fame rested on no better foundation.¹ I believed, in short, that its history commenced at Scone, and that there was no reason to believe that it had been brought thither from any other place.

When in England, in last month, I spent a morning at Westminster with the Dean, of whose warm interest in the *Lia fail* I was well aware, and I brought under his notice the many reasons which led to the conclusion that the stone was simply the inauguration stone of the Pictish people when Scone became their capital, continued in its use when the dynasty and race of the Scots became predominant, at a time when such stones were regarded as essential by all the Celtic tribes,² whether of Alban

¹ See also Innes's Critical Essay, vol. ii. p. 695.

² The coronation of Celtic chieftains on a stone is a prominent feature in all the accounts of the ceremony preserved to us in Irish records, and from these authori-

or of Ireland. It was with great pleasure, therefore, that I learned on my return that Mr Skene had undertaken the elucidation of the history of this remarkable monument, feeling sure that no one among us could bring to bear on it such a fulness of information for unravelling its mystery. I have already learned that his conclusions will not substantially differ from the opinion which I ventured to give to the Dean of Westminster, but it will be of especial interest to follow the steps by which he will be able to trace the origin and progress of the fable.

Knowing that Mr Skene will thoroughly exhaust this part of the subject, I merely venture here to draw attention to a few facts which may dovetail into his story.

When at Westminster, I had an opportunity of carefully examining the stone, which is of a dull reddish sandstone. It has obviously been dressed on the edges, while the under surface (the only one which I could see) is rough. At each end is an iron ring, connected by a link with another ring fixed in the stone.

Its appearance is certainly very unimposing, and we should with difficulty recognise in the little bit of freestone at Westminster the stone which is thus described in one of the inventories of King Edward—*“Una petra magna super quam Reges Scociæ solebant coronari”* (Arch. Journal, vol. xiii. p. 250).

It is not easy to reconcile the various statements of the chroniclers re-

ties Dr O'Donovan has shown that one of the conditions of a lawful inauguration was that it should be celebrated at a remarkable place in the territory appointed of old for the purpose, where there was a stone with (in some cases) the impression of two feet, believed to be the size of the feet of the first captain, chieftain, or acquirer of the territory. (Tribes and Customs of Hy Fiachrach, p. 451.) St Columb's Stone, about a mile from Derry, is one of those feet-marked stones, and appears to have been the consecration stone formerly placed at Aileach, the great seat of the kings, as blessed by St Patrick, and set apart for the purpose. (Dr Petrie's Memoir, in Ordnance Survey of Derry, p. 233, where the stone is figured.)

The poet Spenser describes these stones in Ireland, and adds that they are commonly placed on a hill. (Ancient Irish Histories, vol. i. p. 11.)

That on which the O'Neills were inaugurated was placed on the great hill fort of Tullahog, in the barony of Dungannon, and in this case the monarchs were placed on a piece of rock, the site of which in the map of Ireland in *Pacata Hibernia*, is styled *“O'Neal's Chaire.”* (Ulster Journal of Archæology, vol. v. p. 230. Hy Fiachrach, p. 451.)

garding the form and size of the *Lia fail*. In Fordun's fabulous account of its early history, he calls it "marmorea cathedra arte vetustissima diligentique sculpta opifice (Scotichron, vol. i. p. 27). Malcolm III. is said to have been placed in "throno regali;" and the privilege of the Earl of Fife is described as that of placing the king in "sede sive cathedra regali" (Idem. p. 252.)

Alexander III., at his coronation, sat upon the stone seat, "Ipso vero rege super hanc cathedram regalem sedente." (Idem. vol. ii. p. 82.) Balliol was placed "in cathedra regali." (Idem. p. 151.)

These expressions do not seem applicable to the little thin fragment at Westminster, which, in its present shape, could scarcely be a suitable seat for any one, still less for a monarch at his coronation. At the coronation of King Alexander the "sedes regalis" was covered with rich cloths and silks wrought with gold, and around him at his feet were gathered his earls and nobles, "coram lapide;" which stone, according to Hearne's edition of Fordun, was kept in the monastery of Scone, "reverenter ob regum Albanie consecrationem" (Scotichron. (by Goodal) vol. ii. p. 82, with note from Hearne.)

It seems obvious that the stone was either placed in a chair, so that the king could sit upon it, or that the stone itself was originally of a much greater size than it now is; and expressions occur in some early records which might lead us to infer that this was the case. Thus, in several inventories of Edward I., containing lists of the choice possessions of the king, the stone is thus entered:—"Una petra magna super quam Reges Scociæ solebant coronari" (Arch. Journal, vol. xiii. p. 250.) Hemingburgh, a contemporary chronicler, with reference to the coronation of Balliol at Scone, speaks of the stone as "pergrandis," and as a sort of chair in itself, "Apud monasterium de Scone, positus erat lapis pergrandis in ecclesia Dei, juxta majus altare, concavus quidem, et ad modum rotundæ cathedræ confectus, in quo futuri reges loco quasi coronationis ponebantur ex more." The religious ceremonies described by this writer took place after the king was seated on the stone, "rege itaque novo in lapide posito, missarum solemnia incepta peraguntur, et præterquam in elevatione sacri Dominici corporis semper lapidatus mansit." ("Chronicon Walteri de Hemingburgh," vol. ii. pp. 38, 39. Lond. 1849.)

On the other hand, we know that Edward carried off the stone of

destiny, and that the chair which he ordered to be made was to receive that stone, "Pro petra super quam Reges Scociæ solebant coronari, inventa apud Scone;" or, as in another record, "Nova cathedra in qua petra Scociæ reponitur" (Arch. Journal, vol. xiii. pp. 252, 253.) Even after this new chair, with its stone, was standing in the chapel of Saint Edward the Confessor at Westminster, the Scottish chronicler records that King Robert Bruce was crowned at Scone, and placed "in sede regali, modo quo solebant reges Scotiæ insigniri" ("Scotichron." vol. ii. p. 280). Or, as Barbour phrases it,

In the kingis stole was set
As in that tym was the maner.

(*The Brus*, p. 32.)

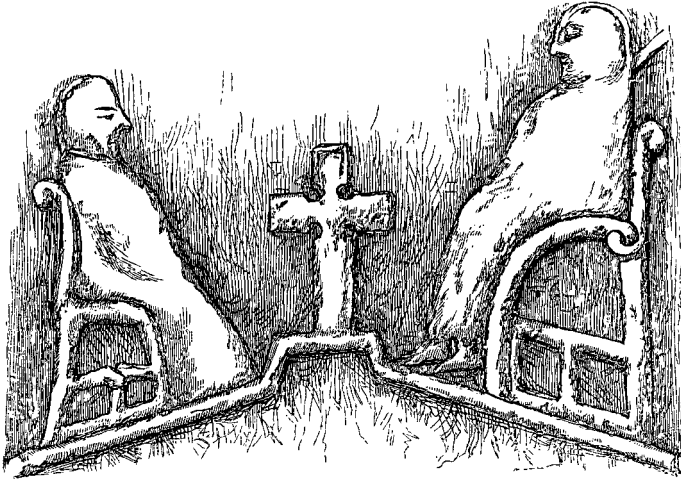
It seems, on the whole, the most probable solution of these somewhat contradictory statements, to believe that the stone of destiny was originally placed in a chair of some sort, on which the Scottish kings were seated at their coronation; and that the "sedes regalis," on which the illustrious deliverer of the kingdom was raised, at his investiture in 1306, was the chair in which the *Lia fail* had been formerly placed, and which the English monarch did not think it necessary to carry off.

However this may be, it seems plain that chairs were well known among the Pictish people, of whom the *Lia fail* was doubtless the inauguration stone. On the early sculptured stones of Scotland which are scattered over Pictland, we find frequent representations of chairs, with individuals, apparently of official dignity, seated on them.

On the pillar at Dunfallandy, in Athole, there is a group at the top above the other sculptures, consisting of two men (one of whom bears a rod) in chairs, with a cross between them, on what may be a conventional representation of a height or moot-hill. This group is reproduced in the following woodcut from "The Sculptured Stones of Scotland" (vol. i. plate xlvi.).

As one of the conditions of Celtic inauguration, described by Dr O'Donovan, was the laying aside by the chief of his weapons, and the placing of a straight white wand in his hand by the brehon of the district, or some other person whose office it was, I cannot help believing that the stone at Dunfallandy may preserve a picture of the inauguration of a Pictish chief of Athole, who sits on one chair, with the *tanist*, or heir-

apparent, on the other. We learn from Martin that the delivery of a rod to the newly-elected chief was also one of the ceremonies at Hebridean inaugurations.¹



Sculpture on a Stone Pillar at Dunfallandy, in Athole.

On a sculptured slab, at Aldbar, near Brechin, are two figures, who, as will be seen from the woodcut on next page, occupy the same chair or bench, and who may represent the same officials of Angus.²

But whether these figures represent the provincial chief and his tanist, or the chief and the brehon, the fact remains that chairs of state must have been common among the Pictish tribes.

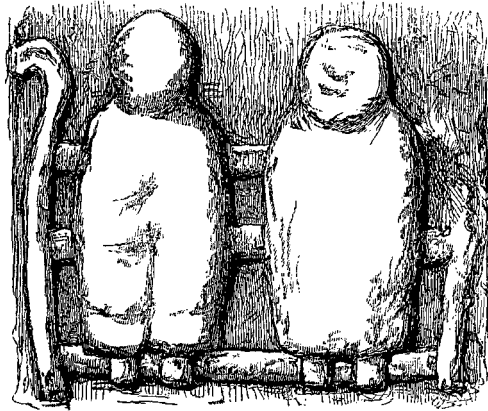
Seats, hollowed out of rocks, as well as naturally-shaped stone chairs, were also common in the early Celtic Church of Scotland. The rock

¹ Western Islands, p. 102. See also Spenser's account of the delivery of a wand to the Irish captains at their election. (Ancient Irish Histories, p. 11.)

² The chair of the Earl Palatine of Strathern appears in record in 1380, when Earl David granted a charter to John Rollo of the lands of Fyndon—"Salvis nobis et heredibus nostris Cathedra comitis et loco domus capitalis dicte terre de Fyndon" (Chalmers' Caledonia, i. p. 737, quoting Astle's MS. Diplom. Scotiæ); and the chair of the Kings of Man is yet set on Tynwald Hill.

chair of St Fillan marks the site of his monastery in Glendochart. The stone chair of St Marnan is yet to be seen near his church on the banks of the Deveron; and St Kentigern had his chair at his monastery on the Molindinar Burn. At the mouth of the sculptured cave in Arran, known as "King's Cove," is a seat cut in the solid rock; but tradition has not carried down to us the name of the solitary whose "chair" it originally was.

When King Edward had brought the *Lia fail* to Westminster, he designed for its reception a chair of bronze; and it is not unlikely that the idea of a chair may have been suggested to him by the previous arrangement of the stone at Scone.



Sculpture on a Stone Slab at Aldbar, near Brechin.

After the chair had been partly constructed of bronze, the king changed his mind, and ordered one of wood of similar form to be made, and we have in detail the expenses of Master Walter, his painter, for decorating and gilding it—"et pro duobus leopardis parvis de ligno faciendis depingendis et deaurandis," to be placed, one on each side of the chair.¹

The act of Edward in carrying off such a monument as the stone of

¹ Edward's Spoliations in Scotland. By Rev. Joseph Hunter, in *Arch. Journal*, xiii. pp. 252-3. (See Woodcut of Chair, *Proc. Soc. Antiq. ante*, p. 98.)

destiny was exactly similar to that adopted in the wars between the Celtic tribes of Ireland among themselves, where the conquerors are frequently represented, in the Irish Annals, as destroying the trees under which the inauguration stones were placed, and removing or breaking the stones themselves.¹

This was the destruction of the palladium of the tribe, and the overthrow of its pride. No doubt the King of England had similar objects in view in the removal of the *Lia fail*.

After the last of the O'Neills had "gone to the stone to receive that name," where his Gaelic forefathers had been led for a thousand years, he rose in rebellion against the English power; and, in the course of the war which ensued, we read that Lord Mountjoy, the deputy, "brake doun the chair wherein the O'Neills were wont to be created, being of stone," or, as it is elsewhere said, of rock.²

The tokens of dressing on the stone of destiny may be accounted for by reference to its adaptation to some of the chairs in which it has been placed, but I am unable to suggest the origin of the iron rings, which, however, are probably of secondary use, and unconnected with its primary designation.