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## THE CORONATION STONE AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY.<sup>1</sup>

By JAMES HILTON, F.S.A.

The story of the coronation stone which is now preserved in the seat of an ancient chair in Westminster Abbey rests on an assemblage of legend, fable, and fact; the smallest of these elements is the last, if it be possible to assign an intelligible measure to either. The particulars I now introduce are brought together for the first time into one view, and were collected for my own recreation. The popular notions run somewhat in the following line:—that the stone is the genuine one which was Jacob's pillow, as related in the book of Genesis xxviii, etc., and that it was set up at Bethel as a witness to his heavenly vision; that it was conveyed to Egypt, and after some marvellous wanderings partly conducted by the prophet Jeremiah, it reached Spain and Ireland, where it acquired the name of the "Fatal stone," and was used as the coronation seat of kings in that country; that it subsequently reached the island of Iona, where it was the death-bed pillow of Saint Columba; from thence it was brought to the mainland of Scotland, and was deposited for safety in Dunstaffnage Castle in Argyllshire, and was used there as the coronation seat of Scottish kings; that it was removed to the abbey of Scone, near Perth, by King Kenneth in the year 850, who caused it to be enclosed in a wooden chair with the prophetic couplet engraven upon it, and where, as a matter of historical fact, King Alexander III sat thereon when he was crowned in the year 1249. It was called the "Stone of destiny," and was used by a succession of kings until, finally, it was removed to Westminster in the year 1296 by Edward I, King of England.

The stone is a squared block of red-coloured sandstone, fitted with two iron rings for convenience of removal, and as it is said, once had inscribed upon it this couplet:

*Ni fallat fatum, Scoti, quocunque locatum  
Invenient lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem.*

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, June 2nd, 1897.

Thus translated by Sir Walter Scott :—

Unless the fates be faithless grown  
And prophet's voice be vain,  
Where'er is found this sacred stone,  
The Scottish race shall reign—

or, as another translator gives it :—

If fates go right, where'er this stone is found,  
The Scots shall monarchs of that realm be crown'd—

a prophecy which was fulfilled when James VI of Scotland succeeded to the throne of England as James I, and was crowned at Westminster, where the stone was ready for him. Such is the outline of a confused and intricate tradition, a legend terminating with an unquestionable fact.

The old historians who more or less repeat each other in what they quote, relate, or assert, are—

John of Fordun, a canon of the church at Aberdeen :  
he was alive in 1386.

Hector Boece or Boethius : he wrote in the earlier  
part of the sixteenth century, and died in 1570.

George Buchanan : he wrote in the earlier part of  
the sixteenth century, and died in 1582.

Raphael Holinshed, who died in 1580.

John Speed, who lived from 1551 to 1629.

John Bellenden, the translator of Boece in 1536.

Holinshed is very definite in his statements. In the first chapters of his *Historie of Scotland* he relates the story of Gathelus, which, being abridged, runs thus (I quote from the folio edition of 1585, printed in black-letter): In the time of Moses and the captivity of the Israelites in Egypt, a certain noble man among the Greeks named Gathelus, the son of Cecrops, who built Athens, got into disgrace with his father, and fled to Egypt with a number of "strong and lusty young men," and settled there anno mundi 2416. He got into high favour with King Pharaoh, and married Scota, a daughter of Pharaoh. On the death of his father-in-law, another Pharaoh became king, and severe plagues fell on the Egyptians, whereupon Gathelus, fearing that evil consequences would fall on him, departed from Egypt with his wife

and his followers, and came to Spain and eventually settled in Galicia, where he founded the city of Brigantia, since called Compostella. Here he was intituled by the name of a king, acted as such, and commanded that his followers should be called Scottishmen after the name of his wife, and in order to distinguish them from the natives of the land. Disputes with the Spaniards led to a war, in which he was successful. The narrative then proceeds thus: Gathelus having made peace with his neighbours "sat upon his marble throne in Brigantia, where he gave laws and ministered justice to his people, whereby to maintain them in wealth and quietness. This stone was in fashion like a seat or chair, having such a fatal destiny, as the Scots say, that wheresoever it should be found there should the Scottishmen reign and have the supreme governance. Hereof it came to pass that first in Spain, after in Ireland, and then in Scotland, the kings which ruled over the Scottishmen received the crown sitting upon that stone until the time of Robert, the first king of Scotland. The inscription also of the stone, though engraven long time after, as should appear, was this:" (observe the abbreviation of the fifth word)—

"Ni fallat fatum, Scoti, quocunq; locatum  
Invenient lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem"—

which, Holinshed says, may be translated thus:

"Except old saws do fail,  
And wizards' wits be blind,  
The Scots in place must reign  
Where they this stone shall find."

In course of time the Scots, wanting more room, migrated from Spain to Ireland, where, among the events of many succeeding years, they having increased in "wealth and puissance," fell out among themselves and raised up a king of their own who was not "a partaker in their factions," one Simon Brech from Spain. He accordingly came to Ireland and "brought thither with him, among other princely jewels and regal monuments, the fatal stone of marble wherein he caused himself to be crowned . . . in the year from the creation of the world 3270 . . . and before the incarnation of our Saviour 697." As time went on the Scots came to

Scotland, where they set up another king, called Fergusius, from Ireland, who "bringing with him the marble stone that he might conceive the better hope to reign there as a king." He held a parliament of his numerous followers in Argyll to arrange how to dwell in safety under one king "whom they would thenceforth follow and obey." "As there was none thought so meet as Fergusius, and that as the chair of hope was also brought with him, they concluded by whole consent to commit that charge unto him, and so, to the great rejoicing of the people, he was placed upon his marble stone and crowned king . . . in the year after the creation of the world 3640."

The coronation stone is not mentioned by Holinshed in the account he gives of many successive kings of indifferent and evil repute, until he relates how the good King Connall died in the year 579 A.D., and was buried at Iona through the assistance of Saint Columba. Kinnatill succeeded as king: he had a fatal illness, and a short reign of fourteen months. The saint having seen to his obsequies brought forward Aidan, his nephew, to be king, in fulfilment of a prophecy and in accordance with the nomination of Kinnatill on his deathbed. The history proceeds thus: "After the body of Kinnatill was interred, according to the manner in Colmekill (Iona), Aidan received the crown sitting on the marble stone after the custom of those days used, by the hands of that holy father saint Colme, who laid his right hand upon the king's head, and in his left holding his crosier" made an exhortation to the king and people. After many years Saint Columba, "now almost wasted through age and also sore troubled with a rheumatic humour, fell sick and died . . .," some say in his own house at Iona, others say on another island, while Irish writers affirm that he died at Dune in Ireland, and was buried there. No mention is made of his having used the stone as his deathbed pillow. Aidan died shortly after (about the year 606), having reigned thirty-seven years.<sup>1</sup> It is said

<sup>1</sup> The words of Holinshed are, "Neither did Aidan the Scottish king live long time after, for hearing (as is said) that saint Colme was dead, shortlie thereupon, more through grieffe than by force of sicknesse he departed this worlde after that he had reigned 37 yeares in

the government of the Scottishmen, he died about the yeare of our Lord 606." Here the historian is in error, for according to his own dates Aidan reigned less than twenty-seven years. That, however, is immaterial to our subject.

that he was the first Christian king of Scotland. After him about twenty kings are recorded.

Kenneth II became king in 834 A.D. The history relates, at page 132, that he destroyed the Pictish kingdom together with almost the whole nation; "he caused the marble stone which Simon Breke brought out of Spain into Ireland, and the first Fergus brought out of Ireland into Albion (*i.e.* Scotland) to be brought now from Argyll (where till that time it had been diligently kept) into Gourie, which region before appertained to the Picts, there to remain from thenceforth as a sacred token for the establishment of the Scottish kingdom in that country; he placed it at Scone upon a raised plot of ground there; because that the last battle which he had with the Picts was fought near unto the same place, the victory chancing to the Scots. Upon this stone (as before is rehearsed) the Scottish kings were used to sit when they received the investiture of the kingdom." Some writers have recorded that "by the commandment of Kenneth, at the same time when this stone was thus removed, those Latin verses were engraven upon it, whereof mention is made before when we spake of the aforesaid Fergus the First coming over from Ireland into Albion (*i.e.* Scotland)<sup>1</sup> there to reign."

In the ninth century we read of kings receiving investiture of the kingdom at Scone, and that Indulph was placed in the marble chair at Scone to receive the crown after the death of Malcolm in the year 959 A.D. And his various successors were also crowned at Scone in the usual manner.

Passing over an interval of many years, and arriving at the year 1249 A.D., when King Alexander II died, the history narrates, at p. 197, that at Scone "after Alexander the second was thus dead and buried, his son Alexander the third of that name, not passing nine years of age, was proclaimed king. There was no small adoo on the day of his coronation amongst the nobles, for by reason

<sup>1</sup> The name Scotland occurs in the Saxon chronicle for the first time. It was applied by the Saxon historians to the country north of the Forth and Clyde between the years 900 and 940.

The Latinised form of Scotia was transferred from Ireland to the present Scotland for the first time in the reign of Malcolm II. (1004-1034).



of the observation of the stars, it was judged to be an infortunate day for him to receive the diadem. And again some held opinion how he ought to be made knight first, before he were crowned; so that thus they were at strife together, in such earnest manner, that it was doubted, lest this contention would have bred some great inconvenience, had not the earl of Fife prevented the same, in causing upon a sudden the crown to be set upon the king's head, being placed in the marble chair according to the custom, without regard to the frivolous allegations of them that spoke to the contrary." He died in 1290. Very troublesome times ensued, until Edward I, King of England, interfered, making successful war throughout the country, and ending as thus related by Holinshed: "Moreover King Edward at his returning into England took the chair of marble with him, and causing it to be conveyed to London, did place it at Westminster, where it remaineth yet unto this day." That took place in the year 1296.<sup>1</sup>

Now let us see how the matter is treated by a modern commentator, avoiding as much as possible repeating what has been already mentioned. Mr. Skene, a well-known investigator of Scottish history, especially as it is recorded in the ancient chronicles, thus speaks in a paper read before the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and printed in Vol. VIII of their *Proceedings*, pp. 68-99, and published separately in a thin 4to volume entitled *The Coronation Stone*, by William F. Skene, Edinburgh, 1869. The paper commences thus: "The legend of the Coronation Stone of Scotland, formerly at Scone, and now at Westminster Abbey, is intimately connected with the fabulous history of Scotland. The tale of its wanderings from Egypt to Scone, and of its various resting places by the way, is, in fact, closely interwoven with that spurious history which, first emerging in the controversy with England regarding the independence of Scotland, was wrought into a consistent narrative by Fordun, and finally elaborated by Hector Boece into that formidable list of mythic monarchs who swayed the sceptre over

<sup>1</sup> Bellenden, who translated the *Chronicles of Boethius* in 1536, makes this disparaging remark about the

coronation stone: "in which it was vulgarly reported and believed that the fate of Scotland was contained."



the Scottish race from the 'marble chair' in Dunstaffnage. The mists cast around the true history of Scotland by this fictitious narrative have now been in a great measure dispelled. Modern criticism has demolished the forty kings whose portraits adorn the walls of the gallery in Holyrood,<sup>1</sup> and whose speeches are given at such wearisome length in the pages of Boece. But the legend of the Stone of Destiny, or Fatal Chair, has taken such hold on the Scottish mind that it is less easily dislodged from its place in the received history of the country; and there it still stands, in all its naked improbability, a solitary waif from the sea of myth and fable with which modern criticism has hardly ventured to meddle, and which modern scepticism has not cared to question. It is still believed that the stone was peculiarly connected with the fortunes of the Scottish race, that it was preserved for many generations at Dunstaffnage, and that it was transferred from Argyllshire to Scone in the ninth century when the Scots are said to have conquered<sup>2</sup> the Pictish nation." . . . "But the history with which this legend is connected having now been rejected as unquestionably spurious, it is surely an inquiry of some interest to what extent any part of the legend is really historical, or how far it must share the same fate." In another passage Mr. Skene says: "The forty kings are purely fabulous; but with Fergus MacErc the stream of fictitious narrative flows into that of history, for he is the first of the historic kings of 'Dalriada' who founded the Scottish colony of Argyll in the sixth century; and the historic kings of 'Dalriada' are now interwoven with the fictitious monarchs in Boece's tale. It is remarkable that when the historical element enters, Dunstaffnage disappears, and Icolmkill or Iona takes its place."

The author (Mr. Skene) proceeds to examine the early

<sup>1</sup> The portraits at Holyrood Palace of early kings of Scotland, "106 in number in a style truly barbarous," were mostly executed by James de Witt, a Dutchman, about the year 1684, either from living models out of the labouring population of Edinburgh, or pure inventions of his own imagination. He worked to order, and the sums paid to him are on record. Fordun wrote between 1381 and 1389;

he gives a detailed list of kings, beginning with Fergus, contemporary with Alexander the Great of Greek history, 356-323 B.C.

<sup>2</sup> It is remarked by another critic that "the entire extirpation of the Picts and the obliteration of their language by the Scots is the most groundless fiction that has ever offered itself for history."

features of the legend, quoting the words of Pennant's *Tour in Scotland*, and saying that the stone in question found its way to Dunstaffnage, where it was used as the Coronation Chair until it was removed to Scone, and there it remained until removed to Westminster by Edward I, and with it, according to prophecy, the empire of Scotland. The latter part of this account, he says, is unquestionably true. It is true that such a stone was preserved at Scone, that Scottish monarchs were crowned upon it, and that in 1296 it was removed to Westminster. Fordun gives a particular account of the coronation of Alexander III at Scone in the year 1249, and Mr. Skene describes the ancient condition of that place at some length. The stone is mentioned by Hector Boece, who wrote his *History* in 1527, which in 1531 was translated by Bellenden. Boece relates how, in the time of the Exodus, a certain coronation stone was in Egypt, and afterwards it reached Scotland; in after ages it bore the inscription (above mentioned), which Bellenden thus translates into the Scottish vernacular—

The Scottis sall brwke that realm as native ground,  
Geif weirdis failt nocht, quhairver this chair is found.

Here we have the first record in print of the alleged inscription. Fordun, writing between 1386 and 1389, quotes the prophecy "Ni fallat fatum," etc., but does not say how the stone came to Scone. There is some confusion as to the identity of that stone with the one in legendary narratives, and of the precise origin of the so-called inscription; but there is distinct mention of the prophecy by Bellenden, writing in 1531—that is, before the birth of James I, King of England. Mr. Skene mentions the legends which I have already quoted from Holinshed's *Chronicle*; and as concerning the stone, or stone chair, brought from Spain to Ireland, he observes that there is much uncertainty among the different narrators whether that was the same stone as was brought to Argyll; that, according to Fordun's chronicle, a stone of marble shaped like a chair ("instar cathedræ") was brought up by an anchor cast in the sea off Ireland, from which a marble chair was cut such as is represented on p. 76 of Mr. Skene's paper by a woodcut copied from

the folio edition of 1577 of Holinshed's *Chronicle*. Mr. Skene says that the stone now at Westminster measures only 26 inches by  $16\frac{3}{4}$  and  $10\frac{1}{2}$  in depth. And moreover it was the custom among Celtic and other ancient tribes to inaugurate their chieftains or kings sitting on a stone appropriated by them to that particular purpose.<sup>1</sup> In winding up his investigation and sifting all the details at considerable length, Mr. Skene says: "The conclusion I have therefore come to is that there was no connection between the stone at Scone and the stone 'Lial Fail' at Tara in Ireland, and that the legends of their wanderings are nothing but myth and fable"; in fact, that the early tribes both of Scotland and Ireland used inauguration stones different and separate from each other.

Mr. Skene's work is reviewed in *The Banner of Israel* for 7th February, 1877, pp. 57 and 66; wherein it is said "Mr. Skene is a man of great learning and research, but his deductions, conclusions, and inferences from historical evidences are neither strictly logical, nor such as agree with the greater and best portion of that evidence as we now possess it." This opinion is not to be wondered at, since the writer thereof seeks support from chronicles nonexistent or supposed to be lost or destroyed.

The entire subject, in its varied aspects and its application to individual and national credulity, has engaged the attention of several writers; see a paper on "King Edward's Spoliations in Scotland" by Joseph Hunter, *Archæological Journal* for 1856, Vol. XIII, 245, and Dean Stanley's *Memorials of Westminster Abbey*. There is yet another matter for consideration in the endeavour to identify the stone with those mentioned in the ancient legends, viz., that of Geological Evidence.

Mr. Skene quotes the opinions of some distinguished geologists as to the nature of the stone; they attribute its origin to Scotland, where red sandstone is common, Professor Archibald Geikie remarking, "As a geologist, I would say that the stone is almost certainly of Scottish origin, that it has been quarried out of one of the sand-

<sup>1</sup> Such as the coronation stone at Kingston-on-Thames, now set up in the street there and said to have been used

from the time of our Saxon kings. See *The Antiquary*, Periodical Vol. VI, p. 271, for December, 1882.

stone districts between the coast of Argyll and the mouths of the Tay and Forth, but that there is no clue in the stone itself to fix precisely its original source." The late Dean Stanley, in his *Memorials of Westminster Abbey*, edition 1882, p. 52, writes: "Wherever it may have strayed, there need be no question at least of the Scottish origin of the stone. Its geological formation is that of the sandstone of the western coasts of Scotland."<sup>1</sup> Professor Ramsay has described the coronation stone as consisting "of a dull reddish or purplish sandstone, with a few small imbedded pebbles. The rock is calcareous, and of the kind that masons call freestone. Chisel marks are visible on one or more of its sides. A little mortar was in the sockets in which the iron rings lie, apparently not of very ancient date. To my eye, the stone appears as if it had originally been prepared for building purposes, but had never been used."<sup>2</sup> . . . That it belonged originally to the rocks round Bethel is equally unlikely, since, according to all credible reports, they are formed of strata of limestone." (See *Palestine Exploration Quarterly Statement* for 1896, p. 84.)

Mr. Skene's paper is followed (in the same volume of *Proceedings*) by another, "a Note" of six pages, by John Stuart, Esq., LL.D., who inspected the stone at Westminster: he calls it "a little thin fragment which, in its present shape, could scarcely be a suitable seat for anyone, still less for a monarch at his coronation. 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 he refers to the *Archæological Journal*, XIII, 250-253.

A writer in *Notes and Queries*, 1868, Ser. I, ix, 238, says that (*circa* 1824) "the block of stone stood under a very old chair, in colour and shape of a stepping-stone over a river: it is now a very nice hewn block, nicely fitted into the frame under the seat of a renovated chair. It does not look like the old stone of former days."

Criticism had been busy before Mr. Skene denounced the early chroniclers. In the *Quarterly Review*, Vol. 81, for July, 1829, there is an article of forty pages

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I, for the extended extract.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix II, where Ramsay's statement is fully quoted.

on the "Ancient History of Scotland" which says much against the veracity of the chronicles which include the narratives bearing on the coronation stone, although that stone is not particularly mentioned therein. These are the introductory words: "The situation of Scotland, in respect to her early history, was, till of late years, extremely odd. Her inhabitants believed themselves, and, by dint of asseveration persuaded others to believe them, one of the most ancient nations in the world, possessed of clear and indisputable documents authenticating their history up to the very earliest era of recorded time. This error was no mere transitory ebullition of vanity, but maintained and fostered by reference to divers respectable tissues entitled *Histories of Scotland*,—all ringing the changes upon a set of fables which had been ingeniously invented to prevent the disgrace of avowed ignorance. Hector Boece, in his *Scotorum Historia ab illius Gentis Origine*, first printed at Paris in 1526, is the artist to whose pencil the flourishes in the blank leaves of Scottish story are chiefly to be ascribed. He was certainly a person of learning and talent, since he was the friend of Erasmus, and is described by him as *vir singularis ingenii et facundi oris*. But when Erasmus tells us that even the thought of a falsehood was unknown to him, we can hardly suppose he ever read that work in which friend Hector

—"in imposition strong,  
Beats the best liar that e'er wagg'd a tongue."

"There was little information probably to be gained from public records, which were not then, as now, accessible to every student; and this, indeed, is some apology for the gross errors of Hector's predecessors, and his credulity in adopting them; but it affords none for the various additions with which it has been his pleasure to embellish the elder figments; bolstering them out with plausible circumstances, and issuing absurd family legends, bardic traditions, and all the crazy extravagances of popular report, under the authority of a grave Principal, for such he was, of the University of Aberdeen." After alluding to Boece's repetition of the story of Gathelus and Scota, and the subsequent questionable stories of some

old "writers whom no author save himself ever saw or heard of, men of straw, mere names," the article proceeds "In this as in other cases Hector dressed up and adorned the rude fictions of early times; upon such principles this notable forger put forth his regular pedigree of Scottish kings, some few of whose names are to be found, unquestionably, in a brief and doubtful catalogue of Irish authorities, but mostly are individually indebted to himself for their very existence, and all of them for their lives, characters and events of their respective reigns."

"No less than forty-four kings prior to the fifth century have been lopped off from Boece's catalogue" by modern investigators; but whom Bellenden and Holinshed readily adopted with the rest of the chronicled errors which they implanted in popular belief." The article from which these remarks are drawn is impartial, for while it does not spare the chroniclers, it gives place to writers who have supported them; but Truth in such matters has taken a long time in order to prevail.

Similar opinions on the accuracy of the Scottish historians are expressed in Chalmers's *General Biographical Dictionary*, compiled in or about 1810. It is there said of Boethius that "he wrote his history in Latin: he is said to have been somewhat credulous, and much addicted to the belief in legendary stories. In this work there are a great many particulars not to be found in Fordun or any other writer now extant, and unless the authors which he pretends to have seen be hereafter discovered, he will continue to be suspected for the contriver of almost as many tales as Geoffrey of Monmouth." "His history is written with elegance and vigour, but his fabulousness and credulity are justly blamed. His fabulousness, if he was the author of the fictions, is a fault for which no apology can be made; but his credulity may be excused in an age when all men were credulous. Learning was then rising in the world; but ages, so long accustomed to darkness, were too much dazzled with its light to see anything distinctly. The first race of scholars in the 15th century, and some time after, were for the most part learning to speak, rather than to think, and were therefore more studious of elegance than truth." The old epigram recorded by Leland the antiquary, more



than three hundred years ago, is still deservedly applicable to him. I take it from page 72 of the little volume, *Principum ac illustrium aliquot in Anglia virorum*, by John Leland, Londini, 1589:—

De Hectore Boethii.

Hectoris historici tot, quot, mendacia scripsit,  
Si vis ut numerem, lector amice, tibi;  
Me jubeas etiam fluctus numerare marinos,  
Et liquidi stellas connumerare poli.

The history written by Boece was translated into the Scottish vernacular by John Bellenden, archdeacon of Moray, a distinguished scholar, by the command of the king, James V. of Scotland, and published at Edinburgh in 1536. It has been observed that this translation "is very far from being close, Bellenden taking to himself the liberty of augmenting and amending the history as he thought proper with a good deal of freedom, departing often from his author and sometimes also adding circumstances, which might not be known to Hector Boece." Holinshed published a version in English, although it was not so translated by himself, and this one, his *Chronicles* was first published in 1587; he was not the sole author or compiler, but was assisted in the work by several other writers.

Another volume of the *Quarterly Review*, for July, 1873 (Vol. 135, p. 69), contains an article on "Celtic Scotland." Though it bears heavily against the legends and early histories, no mention is made of the Coronation Stone. It speaks freely of "Scottish fable" and the "most intricate maze of fiction," admitting that a "residuum of fact survives." John Pinkerton, the "painstaking though acrid antiquary," in 1789, calls Boece the "most egregious historical impostor that ever lived."

These criticisms probably have operated in some degree to shake the Scottish belief; but so long as the *Chronicles* exist in print, so long also will they have the power to mislead. Holinshed is immortalized in two grand folio volumes, worthy of a permanent place in any library, as a work of curiosity. The criticisms require to be searched for, but the trouble of finding them has induced me thus to assemble them for handy reference.



Holinshed's work contains also the history of England and Ireland, so his fictions extend to both.

The alleged inscription now remains to be noticed. Dean Stanley inclines to think that it was actually engraven on the stone, although none is now visible, and (referring to Speed) he says: "It was one of those secular predictions of which the fulfilment cannot be questioned. The passage in Speed's *History of Great Britain*, folio edition 1627, page 912, as to the Coronation of the king [James I.] and queen at Westminster is as follows: "Where the antique Regall Chaire of Inthronation did blessedly receive, with the person of his Majesty, the full accomplishment of that Propheticall prediction of His coming to the Crowne, which antiquity hath recorded to have been thereon inscribed thus—

Ni fallat Fatum Scoti hunc quuncunq; locatum  
Invenient Lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem.

(and followed by this translation,)

If Fates goe right, this Stone, wher e're tis pight,  
The Scot shall find, and there his Raigne assign'd."

Here a slight difference from Holinshed's version is to be noticed: in the first line the word "hunc" is inserted, meaning "this stone," implying that the inscription was actually engraved upon it, but of which in reality there is not now the faintest trace; the next word has the final syllable abbreviated as in Holinshed. In both versions each line is an hexameter verse: the inserted word does not alter the scanning of the Latin. Each line of the Latin, and also of the English, translation is a leonine verse, where words in the middle and the end of the lines are rhyming. This quaint form was much in vogue with monkish writers about the thirteenth century, and I venture to suggest that the couplet was composed when the stone was at Scone Abbey, rather than at any earlier period of the real or mythical history. As already mentioned, the so-called inscription was known to Fordun, writing about the year 1381. Did he compose it?

A new and unexpected light is cast on this tangled subject by a tract which no writer, so far as I can ascertain, has ever noticed with reference to the Coronation Stone. I found it recently when pursuing a

different matter of research in the library of the British Museum, where it is catalogued under "Charles II, king, etc."; its press mark is 8132. f. 2. It lends support to the imputed prophetic character of the couplet, which was familiar to the chronicle writers of the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries down to 1536, and consequently before the birth of James VI of Scotland in 1566. The tract in question is dated more than a century later: it bears this title—"A brief account of His Sacred Majestie's descent in a true Line from king Ethodius the First who began to reign Anno Christi 162. Written in a letter to a friend Anno 1681." 55 pages folio. The purpose of the anonymous writer is to establish the descent of Charles II king of England, grandson of James I, and through him upwards to Ethodius I, who is said to have been the twenty-fifth king of Scotland at the early period of the year 162 A.D. He alleges that the prophecy is fulfilled; and enforces the allegation by printing the couplet as a chronogram of the birth-year of James I. At page 28 of the tract the author writes:—

"Be sure his authority was from heaven. For what fanatick can have a forehead to refuse, that the Spirit of God assisted the penman of—

NI FALLIAT FATVM SCOTI QVO CVNQ: LOCATVM  
INVENIENT LAPIDEM REGNARE TENENTVR IBIDEM. } = 5537

where the four M's, the two D's, three C's four L's, six visible V's, with seven I's, by a strange numerical prophesie, holds to the year of the world 5537, in which was born king James the sixth, who found the fatal Chair at Westminster before him."

4 M.	=	4000
2 D.	=	1000
3 C.	=	300
4 L.	=	200
6 V.	=	30
7 I.	=	7
		<u>5537</u>

The counting up is placed in the margin for the sake of perspicuity. Observe that every letter which is a numeral is brought into the reckoning. In quoting the couplet I have already drawn attention to the fact that the word "quocunque" is cut short, a very usual process with the final syllable "que," exercised by the older printers as one way to save type. In very many chronograms the syllable is similarly treated in order to exclude a redundant numeral letter without

infringing the printer's custom. Observe that the author speaks of but "six visible V's."

The author does not explain by what method of chronology he arrives at the particular date. It appears, however, that he has taken one of the numerous reckonings proposed by early calculators for settling a starting date for the Christian era, in continuity with the vague chronology of Mosaic and Jewish narratives, namely that proposed by one known as Anastasius some time in the sixth century A.D.; which was by commencing the Christian era at the Crucifixion of Christ instead of His birth, or 33 years later than His birth-year finally adopted.

The author would take the Mundane era, the period elapsed from the Creation of the world as 4004 years before the birth of Christ. That however, it must be observed, is a purely arbitrary epoch; but it has won its way, out of a host of others, into general acceptance.<sup>1</sup> His reckoning would stand thus: .

The years elapsed from the Creation to the Birth of Christ	4004
Add the usually expressed Annus Domini of the birth of James VI of Scotland (about which there is no question)	1566
less the difference of years above stated	33
	<hr/> 1533

The author's "year of the world" now appears as expressed by the chronogram...	5537
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One can fancy him triumphantly exclaiming, "Behold, here is another evidence of the fulfilment of the prophecy!" James VI, king of Scotland, born A.D. 1566, was crowned king of England where the Stone of Destiny was waiting for him. Whatever may be the worth of the couplet in its plain or chronogram form, it certainly is not a prediction composed after the event.

From that period authentic history traces the descent of the crown from the House of Stuart into the House of Hanover, without going outside the Scottish lineage.

<sup>1</sup> One authority, *Handy-book of Rules and Tables for verifying dates with the Christian Era*, by John J. Bond, 1869, page 269, says there are as many as 140 different dates given for the Mundane Era. Another authority,

the article "Chronology" in the latest (the ninth) edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, says there are upwards of 200 different reckonings of the same epoch.

The direct descent ceased with Queen Anne in 1714, all her children having died in her lifetime. The root was regained in Elizabeth, the daughter of James I. She was the wife of Frederick V, duke of Bavaria, count palatine of the Rhine, and the elected, but most unfortunate, king of Bohemia. Her daughter Sophia married Ernest Augustus, duke of Brunswick and elector of Hanover, and on her descendants (being Protestants) the crown of England was settled by Parliament in 1701,<sup>1</sup> when all the children of Queen Anne had died. Her son, George Lewis, succeeded Anne, and was crowned king of Great Britain in 1714 as George I, and he was the near ancestor of our present Royal Family, whose several coronations, six in number, on the stone of destiny are facts of recent history. There was an interval of 306 years, of what may be called inactive influence of that stone, between its removal to Westminster and the coronation of James I; but having regard to the numerous descendants of Queen Victoria, we feel that the time has not arrived for suggesting that the active influence of the stone in favour of the "Scottish Reign" is yet exhausted.

This essay does not tell all the story of the stone. More particulars may be read in a little work *The Coronation Stone, and England's Interest in It*, by Mrs. G. Albert Rogers, "the fifth edition revised and corrected," published about 1889, 128 pages. It is her endeavour to prove that the stone at Westminster is the identical one that was Jacob's pillow at Bethel, and to attest in consequence Queen Victoria's right to reign. The work is worthy of perusal. See also a work published by the "Palestine Exploration Committee," *The Bible and Modern Discoveries*, by H. A. Harper, 4th Edition, 1891. At pp. 29, 407, the "ridiculous theory" of Jacob's stone is commented on. The subject was treated of, as to other points, in the *Archæological Journal* for 1856,

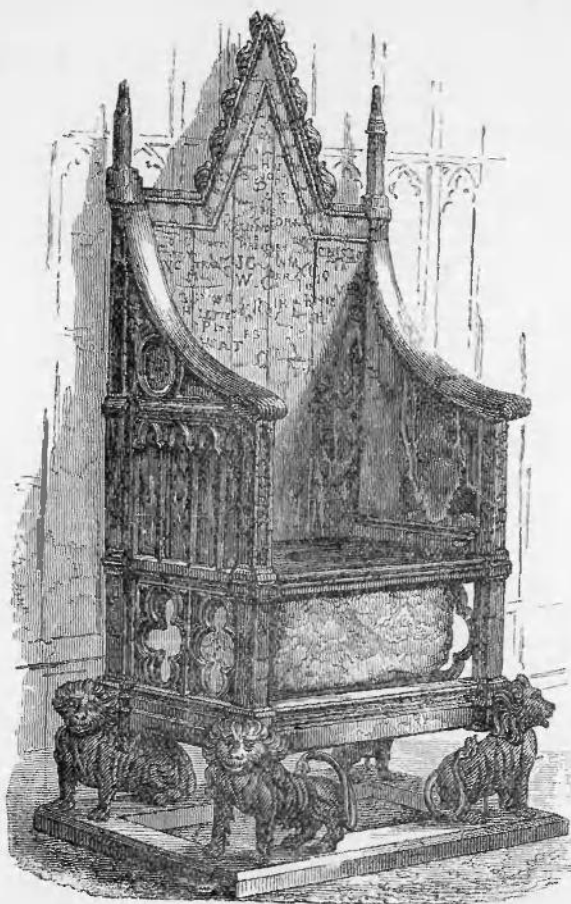
<sup>1</sup> By 1 & 2 Will. III, c. 2, known as the Act of Settlement. In the *Quarterly Review* for September, 1841, Vol. 68, p. 435, it is stated that the descendants of the queen of Bohemia's daughter, the Electress Sophia of Hanover are almost innumerable; and that there is

a moral impossibility of the failure of a Protestant heir in virtue of the Act of Settlement. Then follows a surprisingly long list of those to whom the succession would pass, next to the issue of George III.

Vol. XIII, p. 245, in a paper entitled "King Edward's Spoliations in Scotland in 1296. The Coronation Stone: Original and Unpublished Evidence." As these authorities are easy of access I do not quote from them in these remarks.

I have failed to find any recognition of the curious tract with the chronogram in the several publications of the Bannatyne Club of Edinburgh, the Maitland Club of Glasgow, the Spalding Club of Aberdeen, the Abbotsford Club, the Grampian Club, the Roxburghe Club, and some other more scattered collections devoted to the elucidation of Scottish history. To these I may add the *Edinburgh Review*.

In 1887 it was reported to the Society of Antiquaries that the Coronation Chair had been tampered with during the preparations for the Queen's Jubilee Thanksgiving Service on June 21 in Westminster Abbey by covering the woodwork with a dark brown "oak stain," thereby effectually defacing and obliterating the remains of the decoration done by Master Walter the painter by order of King Edward I, about the year 1300. The circumstance was questioned in the House of Commons on 24th June, 1887, when the minister replied that the chair "had not been in any way stained or disfigured," etc. Shortly afterwards a workman was observed by my informant to be very busy with detergents and rough textile stuff rubbing and scraping the chair, apparently to remove something from its surface. The question was repeated in the House of Commons on 5th July, 1887, when the minister replied, "It is true that the chair was slightly darkened; that he was in error in what he had before said; but what had been done was easily undone, and that the chair was now in substance exactly as it was before." The answer to that extent seemed satisfactory: the brown varnish had been removed; but a dark stain was still seen where it had been put on, and some fear existed that it would become darker. See the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, Second Series, Vol. XI, pp. 427, 438. See also the *Times* newspaper, 25th June, 1887, page 11, and 6th July, 1887, page 7. The chair is made of oak wood, and it is not doubted that it is the one made by order of Edward I. It is now defaced



THE CORONATION CHAIR, WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

(From Litchfield's "*Illustrated History of Furniture.*")



by names and initials cut in the wood by Westminster schoolboys and others in years past, when it was not protected by an iron bar as at present, and was less carefully watched than at this period. The lions at the base were gilt for the occasion of the jubilee, and they still wear the same golden surface. The stone is open to view, and, as is stated by Mr. Burges, there is a rectangular groove of 1 foot 2 inches by 9 inches on the upper surface which may have received a metal plate with the inscription engraved upon it. The present appearance of the stone and chair is represented in the illustration.<sup>1</sup>

Some further notice of the Chair is met with in *Gleanings from Westminster Abbey*, by G. G. Scott, Edition 1863, in a chapter therein by the late William Burges, containing *inter alia* two engraved illustrations, with an account of the payments made to Master Walter for decorating the chair, and a description of the same; also in a little work, *Regal Records, or a Chronicle of the Coronations of Queens Regnant of England*, by J. R. Planché, F.S.A., 1838; where the stone and chair are described and the legend alluded to. The Society of Antiquaries is in possession of drawings made in 1863 of the decoration of the chair: these were sent for the minister's inspection when the question was raised in the House of Commons, to show the condition of the same before the affair of the "brown varnish."

#### APPENDIX.

The following extracts, addressed both to the antiquary and the geologist, bear upon the question, and perhaps settle it, "From what country did the Coronation Stone originally come?"—

I. In Dean Stanley's *Memorials of Westminster Abbey*, 3rd Edition, pp. 61 etc., the following passages occur (his narrative being condensed from Holinshed's *Chronicle*, and other sources): The stony pillow of Jacob was transported to Egypt and other places . . . it was thrown on the seashore of Ireland as an anchor; or, (for the

<sup>1</sup> The Institute is indebted to Mr. F. Litchfield for permission to make use of the accompanying illustration, which

originally appeared in his work *The History of Furniture*, published (3rd Edition) 1893.



legend varies at this point) an anchor which was cast out, in consequence of a rising storm, pulled up the stone from the bottom of the sea. On the sacred Hill of Tara it became the "Stone of Destiny." On it the kings of Ireland were placed. If the chief was a true successor the stone was silent; if a pretender it groaned aloud as with thunder. At this point where the legend begins to pass into history, the voice of national discord begins to make itself heard. . . . Fergus the founder of the Scottish Monarchy bears the sacred stone across the sea from Ireland to Dunstaffnage in Scotland. . . . At Scone it assumes an unquestionable historical position. . . . Wherever else it may have strayed, there need be no question, at least, of its Scottish origin . . . from the sandstone of the western coasts; . . . on this precious relic Edward I. fixed his hold. . . . The Scots made many unsuccessful attempts to recover it. . . . In Westminster Abbey, in spite of treaties and negotiations, it remained and still remains.

At page 587 Stanley gives at full length a copy of a letter from the late Joseph Robertson of the Register House, Edinburgh, July 7, 1866, "in answer to some questions arising out of a long conversation in 1864." It begins thus:—We have a few Scottish Chronicles, written at various periods from the tenth to the middle or latter part of the thirteenth century; but in no one of these is there notice of the Stone of Scone. Their silence is remarkable, as although they are for the most part brief, they mention things of less mark. They show, at the same time, that at least as early as A.D. 906, Scone was a royal city, the meeting place of a national council or assembly, and that Scottish kings were crowned there, "*super Cathedram Regalem lapideam*," as in one of the chronicles about the year 1100. . . . So far as I see at this moment the oldest writer who tells the legend of the Royal Stone is William of Rishanger, who appears to have lived until after A.D. 1327; he describes the coronation in 1292 of king John Balliol at Scone, "*Collocatus super lapidem Regalem*." . . . Fordun is the next writer; he was alive in 1386; he tells two stories about it, one that it was brought from Spain to Ireland, and from thence to Scotland; the other that it was dragged up from the bottom of the sea, along with the anchor of a ship, etc. Both stories speak of the stone as of marble hewn into the form of a chair. (Other versions of the legend are quoted.) . . .

Andrew of Wyntoun, prior of St. Serf's Inch in Lochleven, wrote about the year 1424 a *Metrical Chronicle of Scotland*, remarkable for the fidelity with which it follows the more ancient records. His version of the legend of the Stone of Scone is, that a king of Spain, the father of Simon Brek, gave to his son the King's Stone of Spain—"a gret Stane that fore this Kyngis sete was made"—and bade him to take it to Ireland:—

And wyn that land and occupy,  
And halde that Stane perpetually.  
And make it his sege Stane  
As thai of Spayne did of it ane.

Passing over other quotations given by Mr. Robertson, he says that Hector Boece was a weak and credulous writer, who begins his legend of the Stone with Gathelus in Spain. . . . I need scarcely

say that the descent of the Scots from Scota and Gathelus is a pure fable invented, it would seem, about A.D. 1296. The Milesian dynasty of Ireland is equally mythical. But Fergus son of Erc really lived, and reigned as the first king of the Scots in North Britain or rather in that corner now called Argyll then called Dalriada. But instead of reigning before Christ, he reigned about 500 years after Christ. After disposing of the legends of the Stone having been the pillow of Jacob or of St. Columba, Mr. Robertson says, Let me add, that there appears some reason to suppose that there were two stones at Scone, (i) the Stone of Fate now at Westminster; (ii) a Stone Chair, in which it would seem the Stone of Fate was placed when kings were to be inaugurated. Nothing is more certain than that king Edward I carried the Stone of Fate to Westminster in 1296. Yet, in 1306 we read that king Robert Bruce was placed in the Royal Seat at Scone. So also king Robert II had been crowned and anointed at Scone, on 26 March, 1371 we have record of his sitting next day in the Royal Seat on the Moothill of Scone. We learn elsewhere that the Moothill was on the north side of the monastery of Scone outside the churchyard. This distinction between the Stone of Fate and the Stone Chair may explain away the difficulties which suggest themselves in the way of applying the descriptions of some of the Scottish Chronicles which I have quoted, to the oblong block of stone now at Westminster.

Here end the extracts from the letter.

II. In the same volume, at page 594, Dean Stanley gives a "Geological Account of the Coronation Stone, by Professor A. C. Ramsay, LL.D., F.R.S., Director of the Geological Survey of England, etc., etc., June 19, 1865:"—At the request of the Dean of Westminster, I joined a party for the purpose of examining the Coronation Stone in Westminster Abbey in June 1865. The following remarks are the result of my observations:—The Coronation Stone consists of a dull reddish or purplish sandstone, with a few small imbedded pebbles. One of these is of quartz, and two others of a dark material, the nature of which I was unable to ascertain. They may be Lydian stone. The rock is calcareous, and is of the kind that masons call freestone. Chisel marks are visible on one or more of its sides. A little mortar was in the sockets in which the iron rings lie, apparently not of very ancient date. To my eye the stone appears as if it had originally been prepared for building purposes, but had never been used.

It is very difficult to settle the geological formation to which any far-transported mass of stone may belong, especially when the history of the mass is somewhat vague in its earlier stages. The country around Scone is formed of Old Red Sandstone, and the tints of different portions of that formation are so various, that it is quite possible the Coronation Stone may have been derived from one of its strata. The country round Dunstaffnage also consists of Old Red Sandstone, reddish or purplish in hue, and much of it is conglomerate near Oban, Dunolly, and in other places.<sup>1</sup> In M'Culloch's *Western Isles*

<sup>1</sup> The fossils peculiar to the Old Red Sandstone formation of Britain are fully described in the works of Lyell and Hugh Miller. Those of the New Red,

distinct from those of the Old Red, are likewise specially mentioned in the same, and in other geological works.

of Scotland, there is a note at p. 112, Vol. II, in which, writing of the Coronation Stone, he says, "The stone in question is a calcareous sandstone, exactly resembling that which forms the doorway of Dunstaffnage Castle." There can be little doubt that the Castle was built of the rocks of the neighbourhood, the sandstone strata of which are described, in a letter before me by my colleague, Mr. Geikie, as "dull reddish or purplish." This precisely agrees with the character of the Coronation Stone itself. M'Culloch does not mention how he ascertained that the stone in question (the Coronation Stone itself) is calcareous. His description, however, is correct. When the stone was placed on the table in the Abbey, the lower part of it was swept with a soft brush, and about as many grains of sand were thus detached from the stone as would cover a sixpence. Among these was a minute fragment of the stone itself. These were tested for me in Dr. Percy's laboratory by Mr. Ward, and found to be slightly calcareous. The red colouring-matter is peroxide of iron. There can be no doubt that the stone-dust brushed off the lower surface of the stone truly represents the matter of which the mass is composed. It was simply loosened by old age; and when examined with the magnifying glass, showed grains of quartz and a few small scales of mica, precisely similar to those observed in the Stone itself.

On the whole I incline to think (with M'Culloch) that the doorway of Dunstaffnage Castle may have been derived from the same parent rock, though as there are plenty of red sandstones in Ireland (from whence it is said to have been brought) it may be impossible to prove precisely its origin.

It is extremely improbable that the Stone has been derived from any of the rocks of the Hill of Tara, from whence it is said to have been transported to Scotland; for they, on the authority of Mr. Jukes, Director of the Geological Survey of Ireland, are of Carboniferous Age, and (as explained in one of the memoirs of the Irish survey) do not present the texture or red colour characteristic of the Coronation Stone.

Neither could it have been taken from the rocks of Iona, which, on the authority of my colleague Mr. Geikie, consist of "a flaggy micaceous grit or gneiss. There is no red sandstone on it, so far as I know; indeed, I am quite sure there is none."

That it belonged originally to the rocks round Bethel is equally unlikely, since, according to all credible reports, they are formed of strata of limestone.

The rocks of Egypt, so far as I know, consist chiefly of nummulitic limestone, of which the Great Pyramid is built; and though we know of crystalline rocks (such as syenite, etc.) in Egypt, I have never heard of any strata occurring there, similar to the red sandstone of the Coronation Stone.—Dean Stanley adds in a footnote: The conclusions from the above statements are as follows: 1. The stone is certainly from Scotland, probably from Scone. 2. Comparing the present size 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 the marks of chiselling on its surface. 3. The legend of its travels from the East seems to have been invented by Baldred Bisset, who was sent

by the Pope, A.D. 1300, to outbid the claims put forward by Edward I. for the dominion of England over Scotland through the alleged conquest by the Trojans. 4. The chair in which it was placed at Scone seems to have been left, and continued to be used for the coronation of Scottish sovereigns. Then follows a page of Latin verses on the stone written in the time of James I.

III. The geological position of the Egyptian sandstone seems to differ materially from that of the Scottish Old Red Sandstone; as explained by the following extracts from the *Journal of the Geological Society*, which present us with additional reason for belief that Egypt has no claim to be the origin of the Coronation Stone.

At p. 329 of Vol. IV of that journal for the year 1848 is a long paper by Lieut. Newbold on the geology of Egypt. The formation of what he calls the Lower Sandstone, so far as at present known, occupies but a small portion of the superficies of Egypt, and that near its southern limits, thence passing into Nubia. No fossils have hitherto been found in it, . . . about 25° 10' North, extending nearly to Syene . . . a distance of about 70 miles . . . where both it and the superincumbent limestone are overthrown by syenite and diorite. The sandstone here, near its junction with these rocks, passes into puddingstone and breccia. . . . Its lithological character varies from a loose granular aggregate of quartz, held together by a felspathic, calcareous or ferruginous cement, to a compact quartz rock. The pebbles in its interstratified breccias are usually of chert, flinty slate, agate or jasper, many of them evidently derived from the subjacent clay-slate. . . . This stone entered largely into the construction of the temples of Upper Egypt and its colossi, for which purpose it was usually quarried at Hadjar Silsilis, a little to the north of Syene, in immense blocks. The colossal statue of the Vocal Memnon was hewn from this rock, and many of the sphinxes at Carnac. Ehrenberg thought this sandstone formation identical with the Quader-sandstein of German geologists, and Russeger with the Keuper of the French geologists; but until further information is gained regarding it, we must hesitate to class it with any known European formation, though in mineral character, and its saliferous and gypsiferous nature it certainly resembles our New Red Sandstone.

At p. 334, the Upper or overlying sandstone formation is described. It overlies the limestone, . . . in patches stretching from the Mediterranean far into the Nubian and Lybian deserts, and into Abyssinia. . . . It varies from a compact crystalline rock of blood-red, white or yellow colour, to a loose quartzose grit and conglomerate, imbedding rounded and angular pebbles usually of a siliceous nature, viz. quartz, chert, jasper, etc. . . . The cement agglutinating the grit is usually siliceous and ferruginous, mixed with decayed felspar and sometimes lime. . . . Generally it has the character of a tertiary formation. . . . It has been used largely to form grindstones, and pavement for Cairo.

In Vol. XLIX, for the year 1893, it is remarked that the Nubian sandstone is of the cretaceous age . . . a littoral deposit . . . the waste of Archæan rocks.

In Vol. L of the *Journal*, for 1894, at p. 50, the subject is continued

in a paper by Captain Lyons in which it is remarked that, the Nubian sandstone varies much in colour and durability according to the amount of staining by oxides of iron and manganese, and the amount of cementing silica. . . . Wherever seen (by Captain Lyons) it is strongly suggestive of an estuarine deposit. It varies from a dark purple-red mass . . . to a white, soft, friable sandstone, containing fossil wood but no other fossils that he could discover. Professor Hull considered it to have been deposited within the waters of a vast inland lake. Captain Lyons considers it to be of cretaceous age, and not carboniferous so far as Egypt represents it.

In Vol. LII of the *Journal*, for 1896, at p. 311, are some further remarks on the Nubian sandstone "so largely used in the building of the temples, and which has wonderfully resisted the effects of time."

In the exhibition now (July, 1897) held at University College, London, of objects recently discovered in Egypt by Professor Flinders Petrie, is a "sandstone statue of Nefer-shem-eni," obtained from a great heap of drift sand at El Kab. The material is of a lively red colour and very friable, probably of the Nubian sandstone formation. Had it been exposed in a wet climate, it would have decayed away long ago. This object belongs to the period of the fourth dynasty, the approximate date being 4,000 years before Christ.

Canon Tristram, in his works *The Land of Moab* and *The Land of Israel*, states that the Old Red Sandstone formation prevails in Moab on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, very different from the sandstone on the western side, which he says is of the New Red formation. This is but slender support to the suggestion that the Coronation Stone as Jacob's pillow came from any spot in that region. Bethel is a long way to the north-west of the Dead Sea. He also speaks of Pudding stone there. This last material is by no means rare. As we have seen, it is found in Egypt and Nubia; it is also familiar nearer home—in Hertfordshire, where it certainly is not of the Old Red formation.

The foregoing opinions of experienced observers and practical geologists, do not encourage a belief that the Coronation Stone is identical with any of the sandstones of Egypt, or that the Stone itself can take its origin from that Land of mysteries.