

the student of English history and manners in future times; for the coronation of George the Fourth's successor was conducted on a vastly inferior scale of splendour and expense—and the precedent of curtailment in any such matters is now seldom neglected.

*'To the Editor of the Edinburgh Weekly Journal.*

LONDON, July 20th, 1821.

SIR—I refer you to the daily papers for the details of the great National Solemnity which we witnessed yesterday, and will hold my promise absolved by sending a few general remarks upon what I saw, with surprise amounting to astonishment, and which I shall never forget. It is, indeed, impossible to conceive a ceremony more august and imposing in all its parts, and more calculated to make the deepest impression both on the eye and on the feelings. The most minute attention must have been bestowed to arrange all the subordinate parts in harmony with the rest; so that, amongst so much antiquated ceremonial, imposing singular dresses, duties, and characters, upon persons accustomed to move in the ordinary routine of society, nothing occurred either awkward or ludicrous which could mar the general effect of the solemnity. Considering that it is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous, I own I consider it as surprising that the whole ceremonial of the day should have passed away without the slightest circumstance which could derange the general tone of solemn feeling which was suited to the occasion.

'You must have heard a full account of the only disagreeable event of the day. I mean the attempt of the misguided lady, who has lately furnished so many topics of discussion, to intrude herself upon a ceremonial, where, not being in her proper place, to be present in any other must have been voluntary degradation. That matter is a fire of straw which has now burnt to the very embers, and those who try to blow it into life again, will only blacken their hands and noses, like mischievous children

From London, on the day after the coronation, Sir Walter addressed a letter descriptive of the ceremonial to his friend James Ballantyne, who published it in his newspaper. It has been since reprinted—but not in any collection of Scott's own writings; and I therefore insert it here. It will probably possess considerable interest for

<sup>1</sup> *Kent* is the shepherd's staff—*Colley* his dog. Scott alludes to the old song of the *Lea Rig*—

'Nae herds wi' kent and colley there,' etc.

dabbling among the ashes of a bonfire. It seems singular, that being determined to be present at all hazards, this unfortunate personage should not have procured a Peer's ticket, which, I presume, would have insured her admittance. I willingly pass to pleasanter matters.

'The effect of the scene in the Abbey was beyond measure magnificent. Imagine long galleries stretched among the aisles of that venerable and august pile—those which rise above the altar pealing back their echoes to a full and magnificent choir of music—those which occupied the sides filled even to crowding with all that Britain has of beautiful and distinguished, and the cross-gallery most appropriately occupied by the Westminster schoolboys, in their white surplices, many of whom might on that day receive impressions never to be lost during the rest of their lives. Imagine this, I say, and then add the spectacle upon the floor—the altar surrounded by the Fathers of the Church—the King encircled by the Nobility of the land and the Counsellors of his throne, and by warriors wearing the honoured marks of distinction bought by many a glorious danger—add to this the rich spectacle of the aisles crowded with waving plumage, and coronets, and caps of honour, and the sun, which brightened and saddened as if on purpose, now beaming in full lustre on the rich and varied assemblage, and now darting a solitary ray, which caught, as it passed, the glittering folds of a banner, or the edge of a group of battle-axes or partizans, and then rested full on some fair form, "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes," whose circlet of diamonds glistened under its influence. Imagine all this, and then tell me if I have made my journey of four hundred miles to little purpose. I do not love your *cui bono* men, and therefore I will not be pleased if you ask me in the damping tone of sullen philosophy, what good all this has done the spectators? If we restrict life to its real animal wants and necessities, we shall indeed be satisfied with "food, clothes, and fire"; but Divine Providence, who widened our sources of enjoyment beyond those of the animal creation, never meant that we should bound our wishes

within such narrow limits; and I shrewdly suspect that those *non est tanti* gentlefolks only depreciate the natural and unaffected pleasure which men like me receive from sights of splendour and sounds of harmony, either because they would seem wiser than their simple neighbours at the expense of being less happy, or because the mere pleasure of the sight and sound is connected with associations of a deeper kind, to which they are unwilling to yield themselves.

'Leaving these gentlemen to enjoy their own wisdom, I still more pity those, if there be any, who (being unable to detect a peg on which to hang a laugh) sneer coldly at this solemn festival, and are rather disposed to dwell on the expense which attends it, than on the generous feelings which it ought to awaken. The expense, so far as it is national, has gone directly and instantly to the encouragement of the British manufacturer and mechanic; and so far as it is personal to the persons of rank attendant upon the Coronation, it operates as a tax upon wealth and consideration for the benefit of poverty and industry; a tax willingly paid by the one class, and not the less acceptable to the other because it adds a happy holiday to the monotony of a life of labour.

'But there were better things to reward my pilgrimage than the mere pleasures of the eye and ear; for it was impossible, without the deepest veneration, to behold the voluntary and solemn interchange of vows betwixt the King and his assembled People, whilst he, on the one hand, called God Almighty to witness his resolution to maintain their laws and privileges, whilst they called, at the same moment, on the Divine Being, to bear witness that they accepted him for their liege Sovereign, and pledged to him their love and their duty. I cannot describe to you the effect produced by the solemn yet strange mixture of the words of Scripture, with the shouts and acclamations of the assembled multitude, as they answered to the voice of the Prelate who demanded of them whether they acknowledged as their Monarch the Prince who claimed the sovereignty in their presence. It

was peculiarly delightful to see the King receive from the royal brethren, but in particular from the Duke of York, the fraternal kiss in which they acknowledged their sovereignty. There was an honest tenderness, an affectionate and sincere reverence in the embrace interchanged betwixt the Duke of York and his Majesty that approached almost to a caress, and impressed all present with the electrical conviction that the nearest to the throne in blood was the nearest also in affection. I never heard plaudits given more from the heart than those that were thundered upon the royal brethren when they were thus pressed to each other's bosoms,—it was an emotion of natural kindness, which, bursting out amidst ceremonial grandeur, found an answer in every British bosom. The King seemed much affected at this and one or two other parts of the ceremonial, even so much so as to excite some alarm among those who saw him as nearly as I did. He completely recovered himself, however, and bore (generally speaking) the fatigue of the day very well. I learn from one near his person, that he roused himself with great energy, even when most oppressed with heat and fatigue, when any of the more interesting parts of the ceremony were to be performed, or when anything occurred which excited his personal and immediate attention. When presiding at the banquet amid the long line of his Nobles, he looked “every inch a King”; and nothing could exceed the grace with which he accepted and returned the various acts of homage rendered to him in the course of that long day.

‘It was also a very gratifying spectacle to those who think like me, to behold the Duke of Devonshire and most of the distinguished Whig nobility assembled round the throne on this occasion; giving an open testimony that the differences of political opinions are only skin-deep wounds, which assume at times an angry appearance, but have no real effect on the wholesome constitution of the country.

‘If you ask me to distinguish who bore him best, and appeared most to sustain the character we annex to the

assistants in such a solemnity, I have no hesitation to name Lord Londonderry, who, in the magnificent robes of the Garter, with the cap and high plume of the order, walked alone, and by his fine face, and majestic person, formed an adequate representative of the order of Edward III., the costume of which was worn by his Lordship only. The Duke of Wellington, with all his laurels, moved and looked deserving the baton, which was never grasped by so worthy a hand. The Marquis of Anglesea showed the most exquisite grace in managing his horse, notwithstanding the want of his limb, which he left at Waterloo. I never saw so fine a bridle-hand in my life, and I am rather a judge of “noble horsemanship.” Lord Howard's horse was worse bitted than those of the two former noblemen, but not so much so as to derange the ceremony of retiring back out of the Hall.

‘The Champion was performed (as of right) by young Dymocke, a fine-looking youth, but bearing, perhaps, a little too much the appearance of a maiden-knight to be the challenger of the world in a King's behalf. He threw down his gauntlet, however, with becoming manhood, and showed as much horsemanship as the crowd of knights and squires around him would permit to be exhibited. His armour was in good taste, but his shield was out of all propriety, being a round *rondache*, or Highland target, a defensive weapon which it would have been impossible to use on horseback, instead of being a three-corner'd, or *heater-shield*, which in time of the tilt was suspended round the neck. Pardon this antiquarian scruple, which, you may believe, occurred to few but myself. On the whole, this striking part of the exhibition somewhat disappointed me, for I would have had the Champion less embarrassed by his assistants, and at liberty to put his horse on the *grand pas*. And yet the young Lord of Scrivelsbaye looked and behaved extremely well.

‘Returning to the subject of costume, I could not but admire what I had previously been disposed much to criticise,—I mean the fancy dress of the Privy-Councillors, which was of white and blue satin, with trunk-hose and

mantles, after the fashion of Queen Elizabeth's time. Separately, so gay a garb had an odd effect on the persons of elderly or ill-made men; but when the whole was thrown into one general body, all these discrepancies disappeared, and you no more observed the particular manner or appearance of an individual than you do that of a soldier in the battalion which marches past you. The whole was so completely harmonized in actual colouring, as well as in association with the general mass of gay and gorgeous and antique dress which floated before the eye, that it was next to impossible to attend to the effect of individual figures. Yet a Scotsman will detect a Scotsman amongst the most crowded assemblage, and I must say that the Lord Justice-Clerk of Scotland<sup>1</sup> showed to as great advantage in his robes of Privy-Councillor as any by whom that splendid dress was worn on this great occasion. The common Court-dress used by the Privy-Councillors at the last coronation must have had a poor effect in comparison of the present, which formed a gradation in the scale of gorgeous ornament, from the unwieldy splendour of the heralds, who glowed like huge masses of cloth of gold and silver, to the more chastened robes and ermine of the Peers. I must not forget the effect produced by the Peers placing their coronets on their heads, which was really august.

'The box assigned to the foreign Ambassadors presented a most brilliant effect, and was perfectly in a blaze with diamonds. When the sunshine lighted on Prince Esterhazy, in particular, he glimmered like a galaxy. I cannot learn positively if he had on that renowned coat which has visited all the courts of Europe save ours, and is said to be worth £100,000, or some such trifle, and which costs the Prince £100 or two every time he puts it on, as he is sure to lose pearls to that amount. This was a hussar dress, but splendid in the last degree; perhaps too fine for good taste—at least it would have appeared so anywhere else. Beside the Prince sat a good-humoured lass, who seemed all eyes and ears (his daughter-in-law, I

<sup>1</sup> Scott's schoolfellow, the Right Hon. D. Boyle.

believe), who wore as many diamonds as if they had been Bristol stones. An honest Persian was also a remarkable figure, from the dogged and imperturbable gravity with which he looked on the whole scene, without ever moving a limb or a muscle during the space of four hours. Like Sir Wilful Witwoud, I cannot find that your Persian is orthodox; for if he scorned everything else, there was a Mahometan paradise extended on his right hand along the seats which were occupied by the peeresses and their daughters, which the Prophet himself might have looked on with emotion. I have seldom seen so many elegant and beautiful girls as sat mingled among the noble matronage of the land; and the waving plumage of feathers, which made the universal head-dress, had the most appropriate effect in setting off their charms.

'I must not omit that the foreigners, who are apt to consider us as a nation *en frac*, and without the usual ceremonials of dress and distinction, were utterly astonished and delighted to see the revival of feudal dresses and feudal grandeur when the occasion demanded it, and that in a degree of splendour which they averred they had never seen paralleled in Europe.

'The duties of service at the Banquet, and of attendance in general, was performed by pages dressed very elegantly in Henri Quatre coats of scarlet, with gold lace, blue sashes, white silk hose, and white rosettes. There were also marshal's-men for keeping order, who wore a similar dress, but of blue, and having white sashes. Both departments were filled up almost entirely by young gentlemen, many of them of the very first condition, who took these menial characters to gain admission to the show. When I saw many of my young acquaintance thus attending upon their fathers and kinsmen, the Peers, Knights, and so forth, I could not help thinking of Crabbe's lines, with a little alteration:—

'Twas schooling pride to see the menial wait,  
Smile on his father, and receive his plate.

It must be owned, however, that they proved but indif-

ferent valets, and were very apt, like the clown in the pantomime, to eat the cheer they should have handed to their masters, and to play other *tours de page*, which reminded me of the caution of our proverb "not to man yourself with your kin." The Peers, for example, had only a cold collation, while the Aldermen of London feasted on venison and turtle; and similar errors necessarily befell others in the confusion of the evening. But these slight mistakes, which indeed were not known till afterwards, had not the slightest effect on the general grandeur of the scene.

'I did not see the procession between the Abbey and Hall. In the morning a few voices called *Queen! Queen!* as Lord Londonderry passed, and even when the Sovereign appeared. But these were only signals for the loud and reiterated acclamations in which these tones of discontent were completely drowned. In the return, no one dissonant voice intimated the least dissent from the shouts of gratulation which poured from every quarter; and certainly never Monarch received a more general welcome from his assembled subjects.

'You will have from others full accounts of the variety of entertainments provided for John Bull in the Parks, the River, in the Theatres, and elsewhere. Nothing was to be seen or heard but sounds of pleasure and festivity; and whoever saw the scene at any one spot was convinced that the whole population was assembled there, while others found a similar concourse of revellers in every different point. It is computed that about FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND PEOPLE shared in the Festival in one way or another; and you may imagine the excellent disposition by which the people were animated, when I tell you, that, excepting a few windows broken by a small bodyguard of ragamuffins, who were in immediate attendance on the Great Lady in the morning, not the slightest political violence occurred to disturb the general harmony—and that the assembled populace seemed to be universally actuated by the spirit of the day—loyalty, namely, and good-humour. Nothing occurred to damp those happy

dispositions; the weather was most propitious, and the arrangements so perfect, that no accident of any kind is reported as having taken place.—And so concluded the coronation of GEORGE IV., whom GOD long preserve. Those who witnessed it have seen a scene calculated to raise the country in their opinion, and to throw into the shade all scenes of similar magnificence, from the Field of the Cloth of Gold down to the present day.—I remain, your obedient servant,  
AN EYE-WITNESS.'

At the close of this brilliant scene, Scott received a mark of homage to his genius which delighted him not less than Laird Nippy's reverence for *the Sheriff's Knoll*, and the Sheffield cutler's dear acquisition of his signature on a visiting ticket. Missing his carriage, he had to return home on foot from Westminster, after the banquet—that is to say, between two or three o'clock in the morning;—when he and a young gentleman his companion found themselves locked in the crowd, somewhere near Whitehall, and the bustle and tumult were such that his friend was afraid some accident might happen to the lame limb. A space for the dignitaries was kept clear at that point by the Scots Greys. Sir Walter addressed a serjeant of this celebrated regiment, begging to be allowed to pass by him into the open ground in the middle of the street. The man answered shortly that his orders were strict—that the thing was impossible. While he was endeavouring to persuade the serjeant to relent, some new wave of turbulence approached from behind, and his young companion exclaimed in a loud voice, 'Take care, Sir Walter Scott, take care!' The stalwart dragoon, on hearing the name, said, 'What! Sir Walter Scott? He shall get through anyhow!' He then addressed the soldiers near him—'Make room, men, for Sir Walter Scott, our illustrious countryman!' The men answered, 'Sir Walter Scott!—God bless him!'—and he was in a moment within the guarded line of safety.