

**HISTORICAL
PAPERS; VOL. V.**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649182404

Historical papers; Vol. V. by Sydney F. Smith

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SYDNEY F. SMITH

**HISTORICAL
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BLESSED THOMAS PERCY.

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EDITED BY

THE REV. SYDNEY F. SMITH, S.J.



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LONDON:
CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY,

69 SOUTHWARK BRIDGE ROAD, S.E.1.

1898.

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PREFACE.

IT is perhaps hardly necessary to follow the precedent set in the four previous volumes by prefixing a short Preface to this new accession to the HISTORICAL PAPERS. I may be allowed, however, to call special attention to the first and second of the papers composing the present volume. It is not so much because it secures a Protestant succession to the throne that Catholics feel outraged by the Coronation Oath. To that we are more or less resigned. Our objection is that the terms of the present oath offer a gratuitous insult to the adherents of the ancient faith, as is powerfully brought out by Father Bridgett. In the short account of *Blessed Thomas Percy*, the recently beatified Earl of Northumberland, it is made clear that, contrary to what our ordinary History Books tell us, the Northern Rising in 1569 was not an act of treason against a lawful sovereign, but the resistance of northern Catholicism to the attempt to suppress it by persecution. *The Landing of St. Augustine* explains the significance of the recent celebration of the Thirteen Hundredth Anniversary of the coming of our great English Apostle. *The Hungarian Confession* is an interesting illustration of the frauds by which the early Protestants succeeded in raising a prejudice against the Catholic Faith. *The Reformation at St. Martin's, Leicester* extracts from the parish registers of that church an object-lesson in the true character of the Reformation changes.

SYDNEY F. SMITH, S.J.

October, 1898,

31 Farm Street, Berkeley Square, W.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
XXII. THE ENGLISH CORONATION OATH	1
By the Rev. T. E. Bridgett, C.S.S.R.	
XXIII. BLESSED THOMAS PERCY, MARTYR, EARL OF NORTHUMBERLAND	45
By the Rev. G. E. Phillips.	
XXIV. THE LANDING OF ST. AUGUSTINE	113
By the Rev. Sydney F. Smith, S.J.	
XXV. THE HUNGARIAN CONFESSION	137
By the Rev. Sydney F. Smith, S.J.	
XXVI. THE REFORMATION AT ST. MARTIN'S, LEICESTER	161
By Dudley Baxter, B.A.	

4634

The English Coronation Oath.

—
BY THE REV. T. E. BRIDGETT, C.S.S.R.
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THE memory of few of my readers will carry them back to the morning of June 20th, 1837, when the first word spoken by every one was: "Well, so the poor King is dead, and we have a Princess on the throne, God bless her!" That morning is vividly in my memory, for I was already of the mature age of eight years and some months; and still more vividly do I remember the magnificent ceremonial which, a year later, on June 28th, 1838, accompanied Her Majesty's coronation. I now refer to these things, because the length of time that has elapsed obliges us to acknowledge, however reluctantly, that the day cannot be so far distant when we shall see the renewal of these solemnities. I wish that it were more distant, first, out of respect and gratitude to the venerable Lady whose name brightens the annals of the last sixty years, and secondly, because it will entail the repetition, not merely of a great national act of piety in a religious coronation, but also of a national act of impiety which has almost faded from the memory of men—I mean the solemn abjuration by the monarch, in vile and insulting terms, of the most cherished doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church.

Let me hasten to say, in a spirit of sincere loyalty to him who is next to wear the crown of England, that I make entire abstraction from the character of his personal act, and shall in no way discuss his responsibility. I think, however, that I am not going beyond the limits of what is right and becoming in tracing to its historical sources what Cardinal Wiseman has designated, "a national crime,"¹ a term which I shall presently explain and justify.

Many of my readers may be ignorant of the formula of which I am about to treat, for it is scarcely touched on in any of the usual sources of information. I propose then, first, to make a short historical review of the English Coronation Oath, and then to dwell on that part of the formula which was added about two centuries since.

I.

All countries seem to have been agreed that it was fitting that the accession of a prince should be accompanied by some contract, promise, or profession. A most interesting discovery has been made in the ruins of ancient Babylon. It is an inscription recording, amongst other things, the coronation, or at least proclamation, of Nabonidus, a monarch of the Babylonian Empire in the sixth century before Christ.

To the house of the sceptre they brought me. Their offering they poured out and kissed my feet, they proclaimed my majesty in the land, Merodach to the lordship of the land has exalted. Now they sang: "Oh, father of the land, who has no equal."

¹ In a letter printed in the *Life of Father Ignatius Spencer*, p. 253.

This is in strange contrast with the homage, accompanied by solemn admonition and prayer, of Christian coronations; yet there seems to have been even then some compact between the monarch and his people; for the same inscription tells us that the two princes, Evil-Merodach and Labasi-Kudur, were dethroned, because "they broke their oaths."¹ In the history of the anointings of the Jewish kings, we have no mention of a coronation oath; their powers, however, were strictly regulated and limited by the Divine law. The earliest record of royal unction among Christian kings certainly belongs to our island. It is a sad one. Gildas, writing of the British kings who ruled in various parts after the retirement of the Roman legions, says: *Ungebantur reges, et paulo post ab unctoribus trucidabantur*—"Kings were anointed and soon after slain by their anointers." The most ancient order for the benediction of a King is found in an English Pontifical, that of Archbishop Egbert, who died in 766. But perhaps I had better first give the outline of the "Benediction and Coronation of a King," as it is in the present Roman Pontifical. The King is to fast three days in the week preceding his coronation, which will take place on a Sunday. The ceremony is to be performed if possible by the Metropolitan, and (as usual with such ceremonies) is a kind of interlude in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Pontiff addresses a beautiful exhortation to the King, who makes the following profession:

I who, by the providence of God, am about to be King, profess and promise before God and His angels, that henceforth, according to my knowledge and power I will do

¹ *Times*, January 9, 1896.