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"Coronation"
broadcast.

May 12, 1937.

LOWELL THOMAS "CORONATION BROADCAST" FROM LONDON, ENGLAND

May 12, 1937

GOOD EVENING EVERYBODY:

Long ago I had an invitation for tonight -- an invitation to attend a banquet in New York along with the British Ambassador and others, a Coronation banquet. But, instead I am over here in London -- for the Coronation.

So perhaps tonight I should paraphrase Mark Twain's famous title and label this broadcast:- THE ADVENTURES OF A YANKEE AT THE CORONATION OF GEORGE THE SIXTH.

I arrived from Rome, late yesterday, and the train and channel boat were jammed with travelers -- all Coronation bound. Although I have been in London scores of times before, never did I encounter such crowds. It is estimated, that for this occasion, more people have assembled in London than were ever gathered together before, in one locality, in the entire history of the

world!

Last evening, along the route laid out for the Coronation Procession, countless thousands, with raincoats, umbrellas, cushions and lunch-baskets found places where they were sure of getting a view. And they stayed right there, all night. In Trafalgar Square, around the Nelson Monument, perhaps twenty thousand stayed through the night. Decorated streets ablaze, everywhere. More official cameramen than ever before in history. The newsreel I am associated with had forty-four cameramen covering it.

By a stroke of rare good luck, and thanks to Sir Gerald Campbell in New York, as well as to many others who put in a word for me, I found myself in possession of an invitation from the Duke of Norfolk, a command from His Majesty the King, to be present in Westminster Abbey. The invitation stated that I should be at the Abbey this morning at six A.M. So I turned in shortly after midnight - hoping to get a little sleep. But I might as well have stayed up. The crowds of merry-makers sang

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the whole night through. There was no sleep.

This morning at dawn all London seemed to be in the streets. Between 6 and 8 a.m. from a thousand to two thousand private cars unloaded the Lords and Ladies of the realm at the entrances to the Abbey - along with other dignitaries. A scene at dawn more brilliant and formal than the opening of any Grand Opera Season.

Officers in scarlet and gold, and tall bearskin busbies examined our invitations, and passed us on to other functionaries.

(I thought I would be lucky just to have a seat in the Abbey, anywhere.) London friends warned me that I would probably be behind a pillar, in some remote corner, where I could neither see nor hear.

I had been told that all the best seats were reserved for Peers and Peeresses, visiting Royalty, ambassadors, M.P.'s, and so on.

Maybe someone accidentally gave me the wrong ticket. At any rate,

(I found a miracle had happened. I was within a short distance of the high altar, the throne, the centre of everything -- in a gallery marked for "Guests of Royalty.")

Of some eight million people in London today approxi-

mately 7,000 were in Westminster Abbey. The doors of the Abbey were closed at eight this morning, with the main ceremony, the arrival of the King and Queen, scheduled for eleven. This meant that we must sit there for four solid hours. And that gave one a chance to get acquainted with one's neighbors, yes, even in London, at the most formal of all formal British functions.

Tier upon tier of special seats had been erected from the floor to the roof of the Abbey, each seat exactly wide enough for one person. So you couldn't help getting acquainted with your neighbor. I found myself between two lovely noblewomen. And as the hours went by, discovering that I was a stranger, they introduced me all around. Right back of me sat one of the King's equerries, who had just returned from accompanying the Duke of Windsor, the man who was to have been crowned. He was with Edward on that recent trip from Austria to the Chateau in France where the Duke joined the lady from Baltimore.

We were in the first gallery. Directly below us sat more than a thousand Peers and Peeresses in their red velvet and

ermine robes and their diamond tiaras. Each held his coronet in his lap, ready to put it on one instant after the Coronation.

Directly opposite and only a short distance off was the large royal box. The first to take their seats there in the front row, were the Earl and Lady Strathmore, parents of the Queen, proudest parents in the world. All morning Lady Strathmore was simply beaming. Lady Gordon Moore, and her husband who is physician to the royal family, pointed out to me each important person as they came in, and told me about them: The Earl of MacDuff, the Marchioness of Milford Haven, the Duke of Northumberland, Lady Louise Mountbatten, the Duchess of Westminster, the Duchess of Marlborough, the Duchess of Beaufort, and so on. And there was I from Dutchess County, New York, feeling like a doormouse.

My noble neighbors told me much about one peeress who didn't quite like the idea of being separated from her husband. The Peeresses all sat directly below us in the north transept, the Peers in a body just opposite in the south transept. Said Lady Plander: "Isn't it too bad that I cannot sit beside his Lordship!" "Why?" asked a friend: "Oh," answered Lady Plander,

"His Lordship will so miss my little asides!"

Just a few seats to my left, all in scarlet robes, sat one of the most influential noblemen in the Empire, Sir John Reith, head of British Broadcasting, the B.B.C., from one of whose studios I am addressing you at this moment. Sir John looked rather troubled for two reasons: first, because he is one of the tallest men in the Empire and found great difficulty in accommodating his legs; second, because he was behind an immense pillar. Perhaps the Earl of Norfolk and his aides, who arranged the seating, thought the head of British radio should be content to hear and not see.

Among the arrivals in one of the early processions, were the representatives of foreign countries: including the exotic -- such as Prince and Princess Chichibu of Japan, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. And -- I saw the face of a Central Asian official who had helped me on an expedition years ago, His Royal Highness, Sirdar Shah Wali Khan from Afghanistan.

Oh, yes, and down the centre aisle of the Abbey came Dejazmatch Makonnen Indalkatcho, representative of the exiled Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie. This, as you know, was what

caused Mussolini to hold aloof and decline to send any Italian Royalty to the Coronation. Incidentally, there is a rumor that the invitation to the dethroned Ethiopian Lion of Judah went out by accident. Just a slip.

As we sat looking over the Abbey the noble lady on one side of me gave a gasp and called my attention to one of her sex just across the transept. "Horrors," said she, "look, she has on an evening gown with a low back and without sleeves. What a faux pas." Then she added:- "Every lady here should have her arms and shoulders covered. Luckily she can't be seen by Queen Mary from the royal box! But, she will be seen by many others. Most unfortunate! Oh ~~me~~ dear, Oh dear!"

(Between ten and ten-forty-five came the processions of the high church dignitaries bringing the King and Queen's regalia, and a few minutes later, the little princesses: Elizabeth, and Margaret Rose, one on each side of the Princess Royal, sister of the King;) then the Duchesses of Gloucester and Kent; and a moment later the Connaughts and the Athlones; Princess Pat; the Queen of Norway; and then most stately of them all, Queen Mary, attended by

the Duchess of Devonshire.

At the moment that the Dean of Westminster and the Bishops approached the high altar carrying the orb, the crowns and other regalia, the sun burst through the morning London fog and the Lady Jefferies sitting on one side of me said: "Ah! Queens' weather!" And then she whispered to me: "Poor Edward, it always rained when he did anything."

The Lords and Ladies in the Abbey were beginning to get hungry. I could see them rather furtively pulling sandwiches from beneath their ermine robes. Lady Jefferies, observing my interest in this, opened her handbag, and from a gold box took some concentrated meat tablets, which she offered to me. You know, the sort of thing aviators and explorers sometimes carry in case of dire emergency. She said she learned this from the Royal family. They always go prepared, she explained. And, I saw a certain powerful nobleman of radio-wireless fame pull a small bottle out of his velvet sleeve and rather sheepishly tilt and turn his face against the Abbey wall. Was it tea?

Oh yes, and the doctor to the Royal Family, sitting with

us, explained that certain facilities this time were far, far more adequate than ever before. Consequently there was less fainting than at the previous Coronation.

(At eleven sharp, we heard a roar from the street, indicating that the King and Queen had arrived.) A few moments later, General Sir George Jefferies, all in gold and red, dropped into his seat beside us. He had ridden down from Buckingham Palace just behind the gold coach of State, he and two others: The Air Force Chief Marshal on one side, Admiral ~~of~~ the Earl of Cork on the other, with General Sir George in the middle, representing His Majesty's land forces. He said that the King and Queen had been given an overwhelming reception by the great crowds along the Mall, down Whitehall, and near the Abbey.

All the while there was of course, another member of the House of Windsor, not there in person, but in everyone's thoughts. What if Edward were to be crowned? And what would have happened had he and the woman of his choice come riding in the golden coach? A lady whispered to me that there had been a plan afoot for Lord Beaverbrook in that case to become Prime Minister; for Lady Diana

Cooper to be Mistress of the Robes, next to the Queen; and for Duff-Cooper to be the Lord Chamberlain.

And then, as the heralds trumpeted, the Dukes of Gloucester and Kent, in their robes still more gorgeous than any we had seen, took their seats in front of the Peers. Shortly another fanfare, and a burst of organ music. (The King and Queen are moving up the aisle,) and the Westminster Choir sings the Psalm: "I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the House of the Lord." (The Queen is in the lead, with six lovely Peeresses carrying her train. Then the King with nine peers and pages carrying his still longer train. The King and Queen kneel and pray, alone -- before the great golden altar.) The Archbishop of Canterbury, accompanied by the Lord Chancellor, speaks, first to those who are in the eastern end of the Abbey, then to the south, to the west, and toward us to the north. Each time he says: "Sirs, I here present unto you King George, your undoubted King. Wherefore all you willing to do the same?" And each time -- as you heard in all parts of this globe -- the shout went up: "God Save King George!"

(Then followed the hour-long ritual of which you have heard and read so much: the Coronation oath, the anointing, and the crowning of both the King and Queen.) Powerful, concealed lights illuminated the scene around the altar, the lights for the concealed cameramen who today made the pictures which you will see before long, the pictures I expect to help edit tonight. These lights, falling on the royal jewels, and all the glitter and gold, almost blinded us.

(In many years of traveling about the world, I have witnessed pageants in many lands, including dazzling Durbars of India. But none could compare with the dignity and splendor of today's Coronation pageant at Westminster Abbey.)

Except for one aged dignitary who became wound up in his robes and was said to have dislocated his shoulder when he approached the throne to pay homage and kiss the King, and day's proceedings went off faultlessly.

No mishaps such as figured in Coronations of the past. Nothing, like the scene of 871 years ago when William the Conquerer was crowned. Then, the uproar inside the Abbey made

the Norman soldiers outside think that there was a Saxon uprising. Whereupon they fell upon and massacred all Saxons who were near. Nor was there confusion today like at the Coronation of George the Third when the monarch didn't know when to put on his crown and asked the Archbishop, who asked the Bishop of Rochester, who asked somebody else, and so on, and then didn't find out. The stately London Times tells how, at the Coronation of George the Third, whom Americans may recall, the dignitaries of the realm fell to fighting for precedence - the deputy Earl Marshal lost the Sword of State and had to borrow a sabre to take its place, somebody forgot the royal canopy there were no chairs for the King and Queen and most shocking of all, the Lord High Steward's horse became confused and backed into the throne. No, nothing like that today.

Today's Coronation, I am told, was the most perfect, the most spectacular and impressive in all British history.

And, so in brief, ends today's ADVENTURES OF A YANKEE AT THE CORONATION OF KING GEORGE THE SIXTH."

And so long until we hear from one of my colleagues addressing you from my New York studio, tomorrow night.