



A society wedding in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1910. By the end of the 17th century, white had become identified with maidenly innocence. But pink, blue, and yellow bridal dresses persisted until the late 19th century, when "white weddings"—with bridesmaids, the best man, and composer Richard Wagner's "Bridal Chorus"—became an established tradition.

Traditions

Defining "tradition" is no easy matter. Sociologist Edward Shils called it "anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present." In Chinese weddings as in the U.S. Marine Corps, beliefs, images, social practices, and institutions may all partake of the traditional. Yet the symbols and rituals are less important than the human motives that guide their transmission down through the ages. Tradition may simply function as a means of promoting social stability and continuity. On the other hand, scholars note, it may be deliberately developed and cultivated as a way of rewriting the past in order to justify the present. Here, in two case studies, Hugh Trevor-Roper and Terence Ranger suggest that what we now regard as "age-old" traditions may have their origins in inventive attempts to "establish or legitimize . . . status or relations of authority."

THE HIGHLANDER MYTH

by Hugh Trevor-Roper

Today, whenever Scotsmen gather together to celebrate their national identity, they wear the kilt, woven in a tartan whose colors and pattern indicate their clan. This apparel, to which they ascribe great antiquity, is, in fact, of fairly recent origin. Indeed, the whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention.

Before the later years of the 17th century, the Highlanders of Scotland did not form a distinct people. They were simply the overflow of Ireland. On the broken and inhospitable coast of western Scotland, in that archipelago of islands large and small, the sea unites rather than divides, and from the late fifth century, when the Scots of Ulster landed in Argyll, until the mid-18th century, when it was "opened up" after the Jacobite revolts, the west of Scotland, cut off by mountains from the

east, was always linked rather to Ireland than to the Saxon Lowlands.*

The Gaelic language spoken there was regularly described, in the 18th century, as Irish. The native literature, such as it was, was a crude echo of Irish literature. The bards of the Scottish chieftains came from Ireland or went thither to learn their trade. The creation of an independent Highland tradition occurred in the 18th century, with a cultural revolt against Ireland or, more precisely, with the usurpation of Irish culture and the rewriting of Scottish history. The claim that the Celtic, Irish-speaking Highlanders of Scotland were not merely invaders from Ireland but were in fact the Caledonians who had resisted the Roman armies, was of course an old legend. It was reasserted successfully in the 1760s by two writers of the same surname: James Macpherson, the "translator" of Ossian, and the Reverend John Macpherson, pastor of Sleat on the island of Skye. These two Macphersons, though unrelated, were known to each other, and they worked in concert.

The sheer effrontery of the Macphersons must excite admiration. James Macpherson picked up Irish ballads in Scotland and, in 1763, reworked them into an "epic," which he attributed to a legendary third-century Gaelic bard named Ossian; he transferred the whole scenario from Ireland to Scotland, and then dismissed the genuine ballads thus maltreated as debased modern compositions.

John Macpherson, the pastor of Sleat, then wrote a *Critical Dissertation* in which he provided the necessary context for his colleague's "discovery": He placed Irish-speaking Celts in Scotland four centuries before their historical arrival and explained away the genuine, native Irish literature as

*The Jacobites supported the restoration of the Stuart dynasty to the thrones of Scotland and England. James VI of Scotland had become James I of England following the death, in 1603, of his first cousin once removed, the childless Queen Elizabeth. Eighty-five years later, in 1688, James II, a Catholic and the fourth of Britain's Stuart monarchs, was deposed in the Glorious Revolution that brought the Dutch Protestant William of Orange to the throne. Led from France first by the unseated King, then by his son, James Francis Edward, and then by his grandson, Charles Edward ("Bonny Prince Charlie"), the Jacobites sought to achieve their ends by invasion (1708) and insurrection (1715). Jacobite opposition was finally crushed at the Battle of Culloden in 1746.—ED.

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having been stolen, in the Dark Ages, by the unscrupulous Irish from the innocent Scots.

Of the success of the Macphersons in literary London, no more need be said than that they seduced even the normally careful and critical Edward Gibbon, author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1788). He acknowledged as his guides in early Scottish history those "two learned Highlanders" and thus perpetuated what historian M. V. Hay has called "a chain of error in Scottish history."

These two insolent pretenders had achieved a lasting triumph: They had put the Scottish Highlanders on the map.

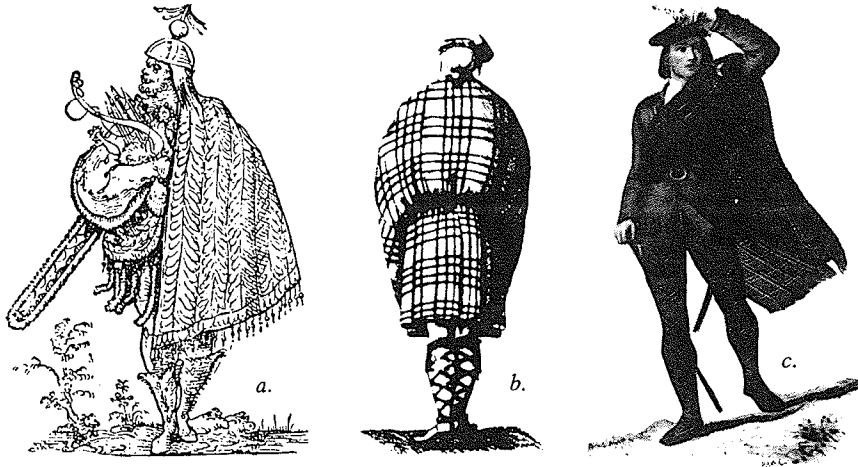
Previously despised alike by the Lowland Scots as disorderly savages, and by the Irish as their unlettered poor kinsmen, Highlanders were now celebrated throughout Europe as a *Kulturvolk* which, when England and Ireland were sunk in primitive barbarism, had produced an epic poet of exquisite refinement and sensibility, equal (said Madame de Staël) or superior (said F. A. Wolf) to Homer. And even as the Scottish Highlands acquired, however fraudulently, an independent ancient culture, a new tradition sprang up—that of a peculiarity of dress.

Inventing the Kilt

Since the Scottish Highlanders were, in origin, Irishmen, it is natural to suppose that originally their dress was the same as that of the Irish. And indeed this is what we find. Accounts written in the 16th century show that the ordinary dress of the Highlanders was a long "Irish" shirt, which the higher classes—as in Ireland—dyed with saffron; a tunic; and a rough cloak, or "plaid," which, in general, was of a russet or brown effect, as protective coloring in the heather.

Chieftains and great men who had contact with the more sophisticated inhabitants of the Lowlands might wear trews, a combination of breeches and stockings. Trews could be worn outdoors in the Highlands only by men who had attendants to protect or carry them: They were therefore a mark of social distinction. The higher classes' plaids and trews were probably of colorful tartan, a design that seems to have come originally from Flanders and reached the Highlands through the Lowlands.

In the course of the 17th century, the Irish long shirt fell into disuse. Accounts of the British civil wars depict Highland officers wearing trews, but the ordinary soldiers with their legs and thighs bare. The name "kilt" first appears in 1727, when Edward Burt, an English officer posted to Scotland, wrote a series of letters, mainly from Inverness, describing the character and cus-



The (a) Irish dress, adopted by the Scots, of long shirt and cloak gave way to the (b) belted plaid in the 17th century. (c) Trews were worn by the upper classes. In 1727, Thomas Rawlinson designed the (d) short kilt. Restricted

toms of the country. In his letters, he gives a careful description of the "quelt," which, he explains, is simply the plaid "set in folds and girt round the waist to make of it a short petticoat that reaches half-way down the thigh, and the rest is brought over the shoulders and then fastened before." This petticoat, Burt adds, was normally worn "so very short that in a windy day, going up a hill, or stooping, the indecency of it is plainly discovered." Clearly he is describing not the modern kilt but a particular method of wearing the plaid, called the belted plaid or *breacan*.

Burt was explicit about the Highland dress because already, in his time, it was the object of political controversy. After the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, the British Parliament had considered banning it by law, as the Irish dress had been banned under Henry VIII, to help integrate the Highlanders into modern British society. The proposed law, however, was not passed. The Highland dress, it was conceded, was convenient and necessary in a country where a traveler must "skip over rocks and bogs and lie all night in the hills."

Ironically, if the Highland dress had been banned after the rebellion of 1715, the kilt, which is now regarded as one of the ancient traditions of Scotland, would probably never have come into existence. Its inventor was an English Quaker ironmaster from Lancashire, Thomas Rawlinson.



to British Highland regiments from 1745 until 1782, the (e) kilt returned in a more elaborate mode, and is now a symbol of all things Scottish, including the (f) Dewar's Whiskey Highlander.

In 1727, Rawlinson made an agreement with Ian MacDonell, chief of the MacDonells of Glengarry near Inverness, for a 31-year lease of a wooded area at Invergarry. There he built a furnace to smelt iron ore, which he had shipped up from Lancashire. During his stay at Glengarry, Rawlinson became interested in the Highland costume, but he also became aware of its inconvenience. For men who had to fell trees or tend furnaces, the belted plaid was "a cumbersome, unwieldy habit." Being "a man of genius and quick parts," Rawlinson sent for a tailor and, with him, set out "to abridge the dress and make it handy and convenient for his workmen."

The result was the *felie beg*, philibeg, or "small kilt," which was achieved by separating the skirt from the plaid and converting it into a distinct garment, with pleats already sewn. Rawlinson himself wore this new garment, and his innovation, we are told, "was found so handy and convenient that in the shortest space the use of it became frequent in all the Highland countries and in many of the Northern Lowland countries also."*

The first painting to feature a person wearing a recognizable modern kilt, not a belted plaid, was a portrait of Alexander MacDonell of Glengarry (the son of Rawlinson's friend) and his

*This account, from Ivan Baillie of Abereachen, was published in the *Edinburgh Magazine*, March 1785.

servant. It is interesting to note that, in this portrait, the kilt is worn not by MacDonell but by the servant—thus emphasizing, once again, its “servile” status.

If this was the origin of the kilt, a question immediately arises. Was a distinctive “sett” or pattern of colors devised for a Lancashire Rawlinson, or did he become an honorary member of the clan of MacDonell? When did the differentiation of patterns by clans begin?

The 16th-century writers who first noticed the Highland dress did not remark any such differentiation. They describe the plaids of the chiefs as colored, those of their followers as brown, so that any differentiation of color, in their time, was by social status, not by clan. A carefully painted series of portraits of the different members of the Grant family by Richard Waitt in the 18th century shows all of them in different tartans. The only way in which a Highlander’s loyalty could be discerned in battle was by the colored cockade in his bonnet; tartans were a matter of private taste.

The great Scottish rebellion of 1745, however, changed the sartorial as well as the social and economic history of Scotland. Acts of Parliament that followed the victory at Culloden not only disarmed the Highlanders and deprived their chiefs of their hereditary jurisdictions but also forbade the wearing of Highland costume—“plaid, philibeg, trews, shoulder-belts . . . tartans or parti-coloured plaid or stuff.”

Touting the Philibeg

This last draconian measure remained in force for 35 years, years during which the whole Highland way of life quickly crumbled. In 1773, when Samuel Johnson and James Boswell made their famous tour of Scotland, they found that they were already too late to see what they had expected, “a people of peculiar appearance and a system of antiquated life.” It was during this period that the Macphersons composed their ancient literature and inventive history.

The Highland costume did indeed die out among those who had been accustomed to wearing it. When the ban was lifted in 1782, the simple sheep-raising peasantry of the Highlands saw no reason, after a generation in trousers, to resume the belted plaid or the tartan, which they had once found so serviceable. They did not even turn to the “handy and convenient” new kilt.

On the other hand, the upper and middle classes, who had previously despised the “servile” costume, now picked up, with enthusiasm, the garb discarded by its traditional wearers. Dur-

ing the years when it had been banned, some Highland noblemen had taken pleasure in wearing it and being portrayed in it in the safety of their homes. Now that the ban was lifted, the fashion spread. Anglicized Scottish peers, improving gentry, well-educated Edinburgh lawyers, and prudent merchants of Aberdeen would exhibit themselves publicly, not in the historic trews, the traditional costume of their class, nor in the cumbersome belted plaid, but in a costly and fanciful version of that recent innovation, the philibeg, or small kilt.

Two causes explain this remarkable change. One was the romantic movement in Europe, the cult of the noble savage whom civilization threatened to destroy. Before 1745, the Highlanders had been despised as idle predatory barbarians. In 1745, they had been feared as dangerous rebels. But after 1746, when their distinct society crumbled so easily, they combined the romance of a primitive people with the charm of an endangered species.

Enter George IV

The second cause was the formation, by the British government, of the Highland regiments.

The creation of the Highland regiments had begun before 1745—indeed, the first such regiment, the Black Watch, had fought at Fontenoy in 1740. But it was during the years 1757–60 that William Pitt the Elder systematically sought to divert the martial spirit of the Highlanders from Jacobite adventure to imperial war. The Highland regiments also helped to establish a new sartorial tradition. For by the “Disarming Act” of 1747, they were explicitly exempted from the ban on Highland dress.

Originally, the Highland regiments wore as their uniform the belted plaid; but once Rawlinson had invented the kilt and its convenience had made it popular, it was adopted by them. Moreover, it was probably their use of the kilt that gave birth to the idea of differentiating tartan by clans; for as the Highland regiments were multiplied to meet the needs of Britain’s overseas wars, so their tartan uniforms were differentiated.

At least one Scotsman, from the beginning, raised his voice against the whole process whereby the Celtic Highlanders, so recently despised as outer barbarians, were claiming to be the sole representatives of Scottish history and culture. John Pinkerton was a man whose undoubted eccentricity and violent prejudices cannot rob him of his claim to be the greatest Scottish antiquary since Thomas Innes. He was an implacable enemy of the historical and literary falsification of the two Macphersons. He was also, in the late 1700s, the first scholar to document the history

of the Highland dress, terming the philibeg "modern," "grossly indecent," and "effeminate."

He wrote in vain. The Highland takeover, already begun, was given emphatic publicity in 1822 by King George IV's state visit to Edinburgh.

Never before had a Hanoverian monarch appeared in the capital of Scotland, and elaborate preparations were made to ensure that the occasion would be a success. The master of ceremonies entrusted with all practical arrangements was Sir Walter Scott, already the author of 11 novels, including *Waverly* (1814) and *Ivanhoe* (1819). Carried away by romantic Celtic fantasies, Scott was determined to forget historic Scotland, his own Lowland Scotland, altogether. "Do come and bring half-a-dozen or half-a-score of clansmen," Scott wrote to one Highland chief. "Highlanders are what he will best like to see."

The Highlanders duly came, wearing the clan tartans provided by local manufacturers who had a long history of resourcefulness in creating markets for their wares.

The greatest of these firms was that of William Wilson and Son of Bannockburn. Messrs. Wilson had seen early the advantage of building up a repertoire of differentiated clan tartans and thus stimulating tribal competition. For this purpose, they entered into alliance with the Highland Society of London (which had been founded in 1788, and whose early members included both James Macpherson and Sir John Macpherson), thereby throwing over their commercial project, a cloak, or plaid, of historical respectability.

In 1819, when the royal visit was first suggested, the firm prepared a "Key Pattern Book" and sent samples of its various tartans to London, where the Society duly "certified" them as belonging to this or that clan. However, when George IV's visit was confirmed, the time for such pedantic consistency had passed. The spate of orders was now such that "every piece of tartan was sold as it came off the loom."

The Brothers Allen

In these circumstances, the first duty of the firm was to keep up the supply and ensure that the Highland chiefs were able to buy what they needed. So Cluny Macpherson, heir to the discoverer of Ossian, was given a tartan from the peg. For him it was now labeled "Macpherson." Previously, having been sold in bulk to a Mr. Kidd to clothe his West Indian slaves, it had been labeled "Kidd."

Thus was the capital of Scotland "tartanized" to receive its

King, who himself came dressed in a kilt, played his part in the Celtic pageant, and at the climax of the visit solemnly invited the assembled dignitaries to drink a toast, not to the actual or historical elite, but to "the chieftains and clans of Scotland."

So we come to the last stage in the creation of the Highland myth: the reconstruction and extension, in ghostly and sartorial form, of that clan system whose reality had been destroyed after 1745. The essential figures in this episode were two of the most elusive and most seductive characters who have ever ridden the Celtic hobbyhorse or aerial broomstick: the brothers Allen.

They came from a well-connected English naval family. Their grandfather, John Carter Allen, had been an admiral. His son, their father, had served briefly in the Royal Navy; their mother was the daughter of a learned clergyman in Surrey.

An Exciting Discovery

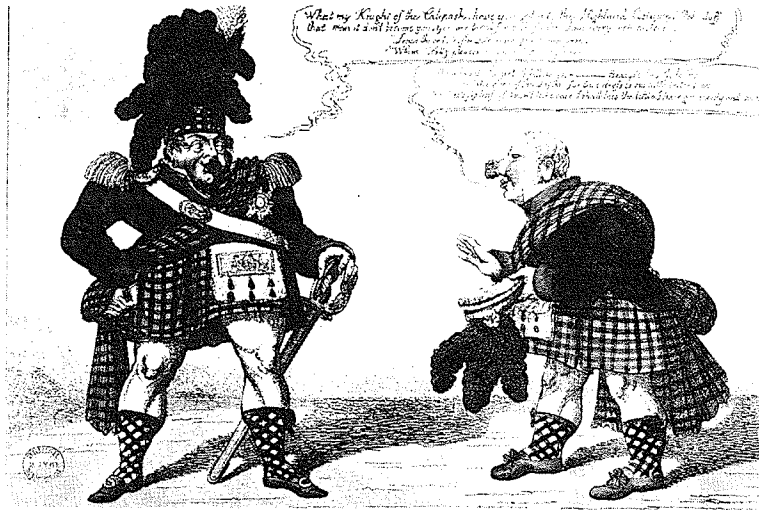
The early life of the two sons is undocumented. All that we can say of them is that they were both talented artists in many fields. They wrote romantic poems in the style of Scott; they were learned, though evidently self-taught, in many languages; they were skillful draftsmen, woodcarvers, furniture makers. Their persuasive manners and great social charm enabled them to move at ease in the best society.

The exact occasion of their first appearance in Scotland is unknown, but they were evidently there with their father during the royal visit in 1822. There is some reason to think that the Allen family was in touch with Wilson and Son at this time.

In the following years, the brothers may have spent some time abroad, but they also appeared occasionally in great Scottish houses or at fashionable functions, dressed (as one English observer put it) "in all the extravagance of which the Highland costume is capable—every kind of tag and rag, false orders and tinsel ornaments."

They had now Scotticized their name, first as Allan, then, via Hay Allan, as Hay; and they encouraged the belief that they were descended from the last Hay, earl of Errol. (As the earl had remained a lifelong bachelor, they presumably credited him with a secret marriage; but their claims were never weakened by explicit assertion.)

Much of the brothers' time was spent in the far north, where the earl of Moray gave them the run of Darnaway Forest, and they became expert deer hunters. They never lacked aristocratic patrons such as Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, whose wife had an estate in Elgin. To him, in 1829, they revealed that they had in



On his 1822 visit to Edinburgh, King George IV (left) gave royal sanction to the Highlander craze by donning the kilt. This caricature depicts him proclaiming, "I am every inch a Scot," to William Curtis, London's Lord Mayor.

their possession an important historical document. This was a manuscript that (they said) had once belonged to John Leslie, bishop of Ross, the confidant of Mary Queen of Scots, and had been given to their father by none other than the Young Chevalier, Bonny Prince Charlie.

The manuscript was entitled *Vestiarium Scoticum*, or *The Garde-robe of Scotland*, and was a depiction of the clan tartans of Scottish families, declaring itself to be the work of one Sir Richard Urquhart, knight. Bishop Leslie had inserted his date—1571—but the manuscript could have been, of course, much earlier.

Sir Thomas was very excited by this discovery. Not only was the document important in itself, but it also provided an authentic ancient authority for distinct clan tartans, and it showed that such tartans had been used by Lowlanders as well as Highlanders—a fact very gratifying to Lowland families eager to scramble in on the act. So Sir Thomas made a transcript of the text, which the younger brother obligingly illustrated for him. He then wrote to Sir Walter Scott, as the oracle on all such matters, urging that the document be published to correct the numerous "uncouth, spurious, modern tartans which are every day manufactured, christened after particular

names, and worn as genuine."

Scott was not taken in. He did not believe that Lowlanders had ever worn clan tartans, and he suspected a tartan weavers' scheme. At the very least, he insisted that the original manuscript be submitted to experts at the British Museum.

Sir Thomas followed up this suggestion, and the elder brother very readily agreed; but that line of research was blocked when he produced a letter from his father, signed "J. T. Stuart Hay," firmly reprimanding him for even mentioning the document, which (he said)—apart from the futility of seeking to revive a world now irrecoverably lost—could never be exhibited to profane eyes on account of certain "private memorandums on the blank leaves."

Seeing Is Believing

Defeated by the authority of Scott, the brothers retired again to the north and gradually perfected their image, their expertise, and their manuscript. They had now found a new patron, Lord Lovat, the Catholic head of the Fraser family, whose ancestor had died on the scaffold in 1747. They also adopted a new religious loyalty, declaring themselves Roman Catholics, and a new and grander identity. They dropped the name of Hay and assumed the royal name of Stuart. The elder brother called himself John Sobieski Stuart (John Sobieski, the hero-king of Poland, was the maternal great-grandfather of the Young Chevalier); the younger became, like the Young Chevalier himself, Charles Edward Stuart.

In 1842, the brothers at last published their famous manuscript, *Vestiarium Scoticum*. It appeared in a sumptuous edition limited to 50 copies. The series of colored illustrations of tartans was the first ever to be published.

John Sobieski Stuart, as editor, supplied a learned commentary and new proofs of the authenticity of the manuscript, including a "traced facsimile" of Bishop Leslie's autograph. The manuscript itself, he said, had been "carefully collated" with a second manuscript recently discovered by an unnamed Irish monk in a Spanish monastery, unfortunately since dissolved. Another manuscript, recently in the possession of Lord Lovat, was also cited, although it had unfortunately been carried to America and there lost; but it was being actively sought. . . .

The *Vestiarium Scoticum*, being of such limited distribution, attracted little notice on its publication. Scott was now dead, and Dick Lauder, though he had remained "a believer," held his peace. Had he scrutinized the printed setts, he might

STAGING AN EMPIRE

"Britain may have lost out on a number of things, but we can still show the world a clean pair of heels when it comes to ceremonial. Yesterday's pageantry . . . proves there is something to be said for doing things the old-fashioned way." So proclaimed London's *Daily Mirror* on the occasion of Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee in 1977. Yet, according to Cambridge historian David Cannadine, the "old-fashioned way" isn't all that old: Most British royal ceremonial "traditions" date back a scant 100 years.

The antics of drunken undertakers marred the funeral of Princess Charlotte in 1817. In 1821, George IV indulged in a coronation of pomp and style "so overblown," writes Cannadine, "that grandeur merged into farce": Prize fighters were called into Westminster Hall to maintain order. By contrast, William IV's coronation in 1831 was "so truncated that it became mockingly known as the 'Half-Crownation.'" Victoria's in 1838 "was completely unrehearsed." And the 1861 funeral of her consort, Albert, was described as "almost a private affair."

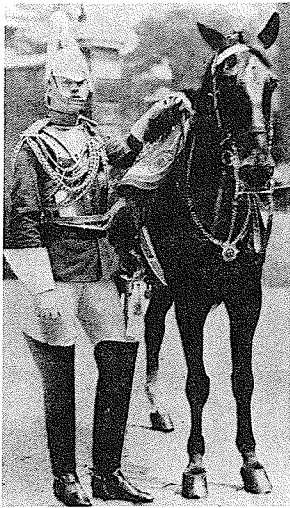
So it was that the last century in which the British monarchy exercised any real political influence saw royal pageantry that was downright shabby. But according to Cannadine, this contradiction was no coincidence. In an age that boasted of self-made men, "continuing royal power made grand royal ceremonial unacceptable." Royal ritual remained "a group rite in which the aristocracy, the church, and the royal family . . . re-affirmed their solidarity (or animosity) behind closed doors."

Toward the end of the century, however, a change occurred. It began, somewhat shakily, with Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebration in 1887. (Victoria refused to don the robes of state or even the crown, but nonetheless, as the *Illustrated London News* reported, the occasion produced "pageantry such as this generation never saw.") The trend developed in earnest during the reign of Edward VII (1901-10), when many cherished "traditions" were inaugurated—the opening of Parliament in full regalia, the elaborate yet dignified coronation, even the public lying-in-state of deceased monarchs at Westminster Hall.

Credit for the royal face-lift goes to three men: Sir Edward Elgar, whose stirring compositions such as "Pomp and Circumstance no. 1" rescued British ceremonial music from the previous century's banality; Reginald Brett, Viscount Esher, the deputy constable and lieutenant governor of Windsor Castle, who oversaw every major royal ceremonial from Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897) to Edward VII's funeral (1910); and finally, Edward VII himself, whose own "promptness, imagination, and invention" in ceremonial matters drew Esher's high praise.

Edward, age 59 at his accession, had waited a good long while to en-

joy the trappings of monarchy. The reasons for the growing British infatuation with elaborate royal ritual are more complex. An important factor, as Cannadine points out, was the "gradual retirement of the monarchs from active politics." Victoria's reclusion in widowhood and Edward's penchant for vacations, acquired during his long years



of unemployment, were one side of this coin; a broadening franchise and growing party strength were the other. No longer a *force* to contend with, the monarch became a symbol of unity above the fray during an era when rising worker unrest was making political and social dealings increasingly fractious. As the Archbishop of Canterbury put it after Victoria's Golden Jubilee, "Everyone feels that the Socialist movement has had a check."

Moreover, the British Empire was finally facing serious competition abroad. The scramble for Africa intensified during the century's third quarter. And by 1886, both Germany and the United States were outproducing Britain in steel; Britain's annual rate of growth dropped below two percent, and its textile industry declined. Nations jockeyed symbolically for status: Germany and Italy's "*parvenu* monarchies," Austria's Habsburgs, and Russia's Romanovs all strove to outdo one another in ceremonial displays; even republican nations got into the act, with the French creating Bastille Day in 1880, and the Americans staging a mammoth Centennial. But in Britain, similar efforts, hailed by the populace, were "an expression of . . . bravado," observes Cannadine, "at a time when [the nation's] real power was already on the wane."

In the 20th century, the British monarchy has grown more visible as the world's other major monarchies have vanished. As the British Empire has faded, new royal ceremonies have been invented and elaborated—notably, the public weddings of royal offspring. For this, the British press must take some credit. Just as the popular illustrated newspapers of the late 19th century fanned Britons' enthusiasm for royal events, so have radio and television nurtured growing affection for the royal family, heightened popular enjoyment of regal ceremonies, and reinforced prevailing misconceptions about their origins.

The truth, says Cannadine, would no doubt surprise "those commentators and journalists who, on every great royal ceremonial occasion, talk glibly of a 'thousand-year-old tradition.'"

have noted, with surprise, that they had been considerably revised since they had been copied by the younger brother into his own transcript.

But the published *Vestiarium*, it soon appeared, was only a preliminary *pièce justificative* for a far more wide-ranging original work. Two years later, the two brothers published an even more sumptuous volume, clearly the result of years of study. This stupendous folio, lavishly illustrated by the authors, and dedicated to Ludwig I, King of Bavaria, as "the restorer of the Catholic arts of Europe," was entitled *The Costume of the Clans*.

Claiming Royal Blood

The Costume of the Clans is an extraordinary work. It cites the most arcane sources, Scottish and European, written and oral, manuscript and printed. It draws on art and archaeology as well as on literature. It is intelligent and critical. The authors admit the modern invention of the kilt. Nothing that they say can be immediately discounted. On the other hand, nothing can be taken on trust.

Elusive manuscripts cited in *The Costume of the Clans* include "a large copy of the original poems of Ossian and many other valuable Gaelic manuscripts" obtained from Douay by the late chevalier Watson but now, alas, invisible; a Latin manuscript of the 14th century found, with other manuscripts, in that Spanish monastery now so unfortunately dissolved; and, of course, the *Vestiarium Scoticum* itself, now firmly ascribed "on internal evidence" to the end of the 15th century.

The thesis of *The Costume of the Clans* is that Highland dress was the fossil relic of the universal dress of the Middle Ages. It had been replaced throughout the rest of Europe in the 16th century, but had survived, debased but still recognizable, in that forgotten corner of the world.

For in the Middle Ages (according to these authors), Celtic Scotland had been a flourishing part of cosmopolitan Catholic Europe, a rich, polished society in which the splendid courts of the tribal chiefs were nourished—thanks to the advanced Hebridean manufactures—by the luxuries and the enlightenment of the Continent. Unfortunately, that rich civilization had not lasted: By the close of the Middle Ages, those humming Hebridean looms, those brilliant island courts, that "high intellectual sophistication" of Mull, Islay, and Skye had declined; Highland society had become impoverished and introverted and its costume drab and mean.

Only the *Vestiarium*—that great discovery of the two broth-

ers—by revealing the brilliance of the original tartan setts, opened a narrow window onto that splendid culture now gone forever. For the authors professed no interest in the modern attempt to revive the costume alone, divorced from the Catholic Celtic culture of which it was a part. That was to convert it into mere fancy dress. The only true revival was one in which the whole past lived again—as it was lived by the Stuart brothers, writing poetry, hunting the deer, maintaining their own tribal court on an island in the Beaulieu River.

Unfortunately, *The Costume of the Clans* never received the criticism, or even the notice, of the learned world. Before that could happen, the authors made a grave tactical error. In 1846, they went as near as they would ever go toward explicitly claiming royal blood. They did this in a series of short stories, which, under romantic but transparent names, professed to reveal historical truth.

The work was entitled *Tales of a Century*, the century from 1745 to 1845. The burden of these tales was that the Stuart line was not extinct; that a legitimate son had been born to the wife of the Young Chevalier in Florence; that this infant, through fear of assassination by Hanoverian agents, had been entrusted to the care of an English admiral who had brought him up as his own son; and that, in due course, he had become the legitimate father of two sons who, having fought for Napoleon at Dresden, Leipzig, and Waterloo, and been personally decorated by him for bravery, had then retired to await their destiny in their ancestral country, and were now seeking to restore its ancient society, customs, costumes.

Creating Prosperity

At this point, a hidden enemy struck. In 1847, under the cloak of a belated review of the *Vestiarium*, an anonymous writer published in the *Quarterly Review* a devastating exposure of the royal claims of the two brothers. The elder brother attempted to reply. The reply was Olympian in tone, but weak in substance.

The household at Eilean Aigas, the romantic residence lent to them by Lord Lovat, suddenly broke up; and for the next 20 years, the two brothers maintained abroad, in Prague and Pressburg, the royal pretensions that had been fatally damaged at home. In the same year, Queen Victoria bought Balmoral, and the real Hanoverian court replaced the vanished, illusory Jacobite court in the Highlands of Scotland.

The Sobieski Stuarts never recovered from the exposure of

1847. But their work was not wasted. The *Vestiarium* might be discredited, *The Costume of the Clans* ignored, but the spurious clan tartans devised by them were taken up, without their damaged names, by the Highland Society of London, and became the means of the continuing prosperity of the Scottish tartan industry. For the rest of the century, numerous books of clan tartans were regularly published. All of them were heavily dependent—directly or indirectly—on the *Vestiarium*.

This essay began with reference to James Macpherson. It ends with the Sobieski Stuarts. Both imagined a golden age in the past of the Celtic Highlands. Both created literary ghosts, forged texts, and falsified history in support of their theories.

But Macpherson was a sensual bully whose aim, whether in literature or in politics, was wealth and power, and he pursued that aim with ruthless determination and ultimate success. The Sobieski Stuarts were amiable, scholarly men who won converts by their transpicuous innocence; they were *fantaisistes* rather than forgers. They were genuine in the sense that they lived their own fantasies.

Unlike Macpherson, they died poor. The wealth that they generated went to the manufacturers of the differentiated clan tartans now worn, with tribal enthusiasm, by Scots and supposed Scots from Houston to Hong Kong.

