

Coronation Vestments

The Sword of State, the Wedding Ring of England

By the Rev. J. H. T. Perkins, M.A., Sacrist of Westminster Abbey

THE three royal swords have been described in a previous article; but no mention has as yet been made of a fourth, and still more interesting weapon—the sword of state. Like the coronation ring, it does not figure among the Regalia, technically speaking, at all. It is regarded as being the private property of each individual sovereign. During the coronation ceremony, the sovereign is girded with this sword of state by the Lord Great Chamberlain, while subsequently it is offered at the altar, and immediately redeemed, by some nobleman, for the sum of one hundred shillings. The sword of state is much richer in appearance than its three companions. It is contained in a scabbard of crimson velvet, which is itself adorned with plates of gold, engraven with rose, thistle, portcullis, and the royal arms.

The practice of using a ring to denote lofty rank extends back to the remotest antiquity. Like so many other items of the numerous coronation accessories and paraphernalia, the royal ring, in the history of our own country, is closely associated with Edward the Confessor. Of all the legends which have clustered round his almost sacred person, that of the ring is perhaps the most touching and picturesque; indeed, it is perpetuated, both in stone and in glass, within the walls of his own Abbey.

According to this story, the king while journeying to the dedication of the Chapel of St. John the Evangelist was one day accosted by "a fayre old man" who demanded an alms for the love of St. John. The king forthwith drew from his finger a ring, "large, royal, and beautiful." Some time afterwards, two pilgrims from Ludlow, while journeying in the Holy Land, found themselves benighted and hopelessly lost. Suddenly the path was lighted up, and there came to them a "fayre ancient man wyth whyte heer for age. Thenne the old man axed theym what they were and of what

regeon. And they answerde that they were pylgrims of England, and hadde lost theyr fellyshyp and way also. Thenne thys olde man comforted theym goodly, and brought, theym into a fayre cytee; and whaune they had refreshed theym, and rested there alle nyghte, on the mornè this fayre olde man went wyth theym, and brought theym in the ryghte waye agayne. And he was gladded to here theym talke of the welfare and holynesse of theyre Kyng Saynt Edward. And whaune he sholde departe fre theym, thenne he tolde theym what he was, and sayd, 'I am JOHAN THE EVANGELYST; and saye ye vnto Edward your Kyng, that I grete him well by the token that he gaff to me thys rynge with his owne handes, whych rynge ye shalle delyver to hym agayne'; and whaun he had delyvered to theym the rynge, he departed fro theym sodenly."

The ring was duly delivered to the King at his palace in Essex, the name of which, "Havering-atte-Bower," is said to have been derived from this incident. It was buried with Edward after his death, and remained undisturbed until the first translation of his remains, in 1163, which took place in the presence of Archbishop Becket and Abbot Laurentius. The ring, as Sporley relates, was reverently removed by the latter ecclesiastic, and henceforward preserved in the Abbey as a relic. Tradition has it that the Confessor's ring became thenceforth "the wedding ring of England," and in this capacity was employed at the ceremony of the coronation. In fact, so great was the "Edwardian passion," that it would be extremely difficult to controvert the statement that for a time, at any rate, the coronation ring was the identical jewel which had lain for well nigh a century in the dead king's sarcophagus, whatever may be our own doubts as to the previous portion of its supposed history.

Down to the time of the Restoration, such records as we possess apparently imply

that each successive monarch was invested with the ring worn by his predecessor. According to certain letters and patents still contained in the muniment room of Westminster Abbey, Richard II. in 1388 bequeathed a ruby ring for the use of his successors at their respective coronations. In the "Device" for the Coronation of Henry VII., the language used points to the fact that "the key ring with a ruby, called the Regall," had long been in existence, and was well known to all. More than a century later we find an interesting document, drawn up by Sir William Segar, Garter King-at-Arms, in view of the approaching Coronation of James I. It consists of a list of necessaries to be provided by the Master of the Jewel House, and among the various "regalles" at that moment in the custody of this officer, "the King's ring" is distinctly specified. From Charles II. onward, however, the ring has been manufactured afresh for each Coronation, and has always been regarded as the Sovereign's own personal property.

The ring is made of gold, and contains

a large table ruby engraved with St. George's cross, that for the Queen being set in a somewhat similar fashion. It is placed upon the *fourth* or wedding finger "as a sign of kingly dignity and the defence of the Catholic faith." A curious mistake occurred at the last coronation. The Herald's College, strangely ignorant of the fact that in the pre-Reformation Service books the thumb was counted as the first finger, caused the ring to be made for the Queen's fifth or little finger. Archbishop Howley, with superior knowledge to that possessed by these lay functionaries, proceeded to place the ring upon the accustomed finger, the third, as we term it to-day. Unfortunately great pain was caused to the royal sufferer by this performance. The ring was only removed with considerable difficulty and had it not been for the presence of mind displayed by one of the Prebendaries of the Abbey, our late beloved Sovereign would probably have experienced serious injury.

It has been the privilege of the Lord Great Chamberlain to carry to the King his shirt and clothes on the morning of



Edward bestowing the ring on a beggar
(From the ancient Altar Screen of Westminster Abbey)



St. John giving the ring that was bestowed on the beggar to two pilgrims, to be restored to Edward

(From the ancient Altar Screen of Westminster Abbey)

the coronation, and together with the Lord Chamberlain of the Household to dress the King. The shirt and surcoat were specially manufactured with a view to the ceremony of the unction, being fastened together at certain places by means of coloured ribbon which could be easily untied. Over these were placed the magnificent Parliament robes of crimson. Thus attired, the King departed from his lodgings, and made his way to the Great Hall of William Rufus. Here he was duly greeted by the Great Officers of State, the Peers, Peeresses, and others, whose hereditary right it was to assemble here, and to take part in the subsequent procession to the Abbey Church. Meanwhile, the Queen-Consort had been duly arrayed in her own royal robe of purple velvet, richly furred with ermine, and bordered with gold lace, while on her head she wore the beautiful golden Circlet. The attire of the Queen-Consort remains unchanged throughout the whole of the coronation solemnity, save that the golden Circlet, at the appointed moment, exchanged for Queen Edith's crown, and that in turn, at the conclusion of the service, for the crown of state.

The Parliament robes, which are in effect the King's processional

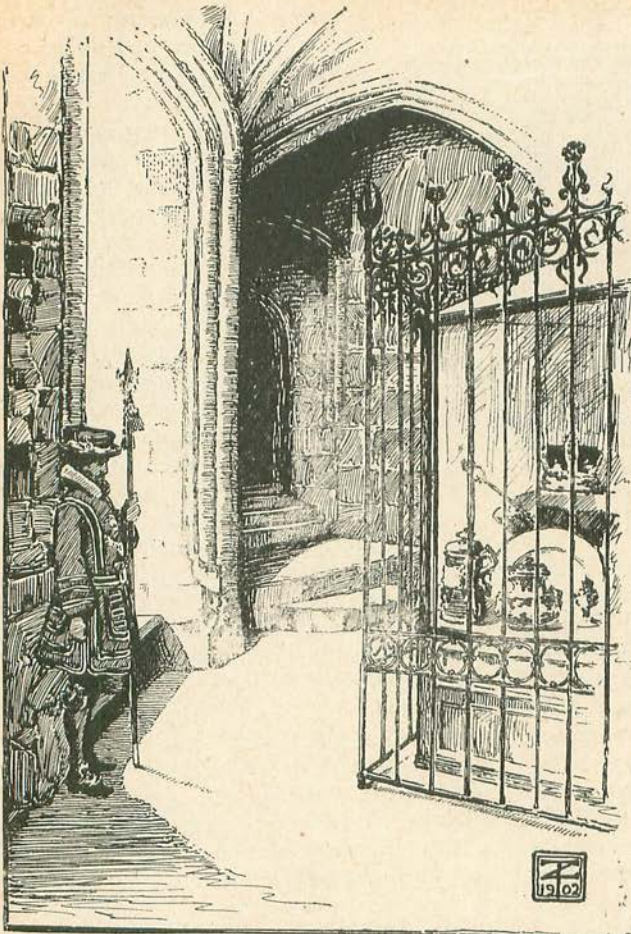
garments, continue to be worn during the earlier portion of the service. With the ceremony of the anointing, however, the part played by the coronation Vestments, in the technical sense of the word, commences. The latter robes are possessed of the very deepest interest and significance, for, like certain portions of the Regalia referred to in a previous chapter, they set forth, and in a very special sense, the distinctly religious character of the entire solemnity. During the singing of the anthem which precedes the anointing, the King, attended, as before, by the Lord Great Chamberlain, is divested of his crimson mantle and surcoat.

Having been seated in St. Edward's chair, he is then solemnly anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, on head, hands, breast, shoulders, and arms. The *Liber Regalis*, a manual which furnishes the basis of the present coronation service, states that, if necessary, "St. Edward's comb" is to be employed at this point. "The prayers being ended a shallow quoife is put on the King's head because of the Annoynting; if His Majestyes haire be not smooth after it there is King Edward's ivory combe for that end." A comb was always included among the



The Pilgrims returning the ring to Edward

(From the ancient Altar Screen of Westminster Abbey)



The Jewel House in the Tower of London

mediaeval Regalia, and it is not a little curious to note that it figures in comparatively modern times, for it is recorded that Charles I. at his own coronation "called for the comb that he might see it."

As the *Liber Regalis* indicates, the "coif," or "quoife," of fine linen or lawn is the first vestment which is placed upon the newly anointed Sovereign. It corresponds in meaning, and to a great extent in appearance, with the amice of a bishop or priest. Like the white linen gloves, which were put on at the same moment, it was intended to protect the sacred oil from any possible irreverence; hence, it was not removed from the Sovereign's head until seven days had passed from the time of the coronation. The

removal of the coif formed a distinct ceremony by itself. The *Liber Regalis* assigns the duty to either the Abbot of Westminster, or some other dignitary of episcopal rank, who, having first of all said Mass, removed the coif, carefully washing and drying the Sovereign's hair at the same moment. At the coronation of George III. "a fine linen coif and a pair of white linen gloves" were presented by the Lord Great Chamberlain to the archbishop, and duly placed upon the king. A similar procedure occurred at the coronations of George IV. and William IV., but it was omitted at that of Queen Victoria, the coronation order of the last-named monarch following out the precedent laid down in the *Liber Regalis*, in which neither the "Office for a Coronation of a Queen," nor the "Order for a Coronation of a Queen," make any mention of this ceremony.

The *Colobium Sindonis*, or alb, is the next vestment to be assumed in the process of investing the new Sovereign. It closely resembles a surplice, though it has not invariably been furnished with sleeves. The material of which it is composed is fine white cambric, but at recent coronations it has suffered severely, owing to the introduction of masses of rich lace "surflod very full," an addition utterly unhistorical and altogether out of keeping with this ancient and dignified vestment.

The *Colobium Sindonis* is followed by the Dalmatic, to which there was usually added a girdle composed of cloth of gold, together with a golden buckle for sustaining the sword of state. The Dalmatic or Super-tunic of the Sovereign bears only a faint resemblance in actual form to that worn by an ecclesiastic; but it possesses a very important signification—*i.e.*, that the monarch is the representative of the Church and the protector of her rights and privileges. It is about one yard

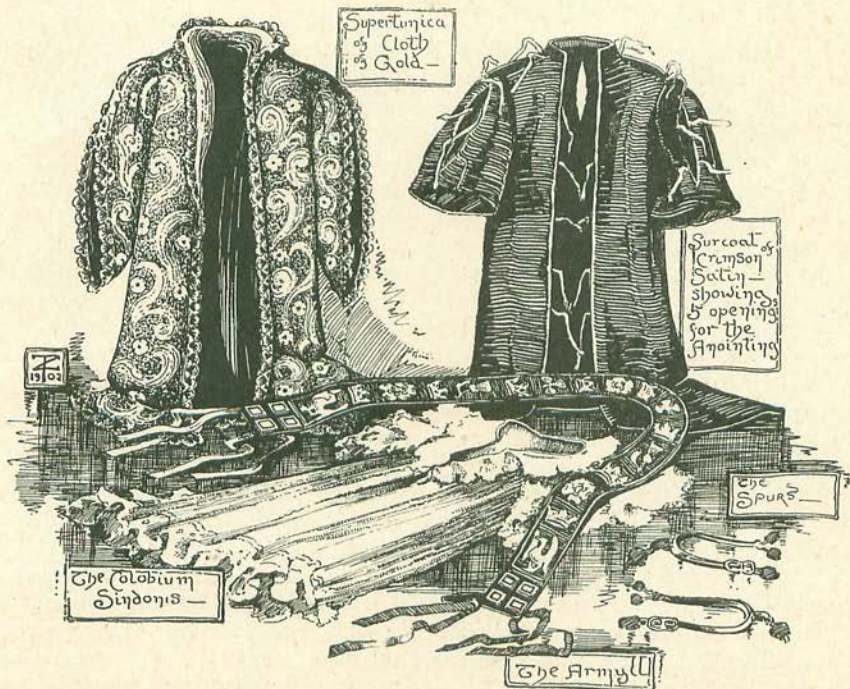
and a quarter in length, while it has usually been composed of rich silk ornamented with golden flowers and figures, both in front and behind, and lined with crimson taffeta. Unlike the corresponding ecclesiastical vestment, it is open down the front, doubtless for reasons of convenience. Hence it has come to be worn in the same manner as a jacket. The ornamentation of the vestment used by Queen Victoria, consisted of green palm branches from which spring pink roses, green shamrocks, and lilac-coloured thistles. It is lined with rose-coloured silk and edged with gold lace.

The ornaments appropriate for the legs, follow next in order—*i.e.*, the buskins and sandal. Both of these garments are made of cloth of gold, resembling that of the tunic, and lined with crimson sarcenet or taffeta.

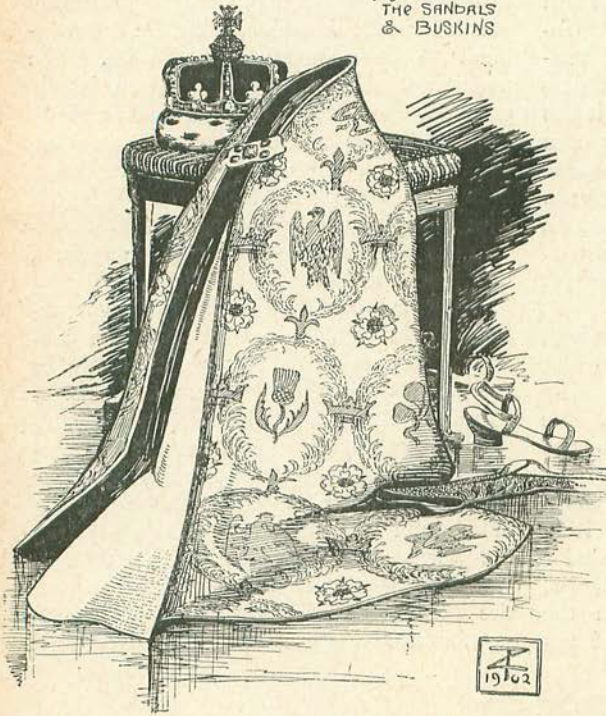
The Stole or "Armyll" is a band of cloth of gold about three inches wide. It is usually embroidered with silver eagles, Tudor roses, fleurs-de-lys, shamrocks, and thistles, interspersed with royal coronets. In the case of Queen Victoria's stole, each end was

embroidered with a square panel containing St. George's cross on a silver ground. The similar vestment worn by clergy, is invariably placed beneath the tunic, being the first vestment to be assumed after the alb. The position of the royal stole, however, is the exact reverse of this, and it is remarkable to observe that no little evidence exists tending to prove the late introduction of the present method of wearing the stole. If this be the case, then, it would appear that the coronation has succeeded in preserving unimpaired, the ancient and original usage.

The word *armyll*, which from the coronation of Henry VII. onward has been consistently applied to the stole, not only by the various coronation orders, but also by Sandford, Ashmole, and other learned antiquarians, has given rise to the greatest perplexity. The prayer mentioned by the *Liber Regalis* as being offered at this particular moment in the coronation service contains the words *accipe armillas*. This statement is fully intelligible if we proceed to construe the word *armillas* in its usual acceptation—*e.g.*, bracelets. These bracelets, or "garters,"



THE IMPERIAL
MANTLE WITH
THE SANDALS
& BUSKINS



are among the royal ornaments mentioned by Sporley. They are distinctly included in the historical record of more than one coronation, while a pair are still extant among the Regalia contained in the Tower to-day. Under these circumstances, the natural conclusion to draw is, that the words of the *Liber Regalis* refer to an investing of the Sovereign with the *bracelets*; the investing with the stole, taking place, apparently, without form of words, and simultaneously with the supertunic. or with the buskins and sandals. The *Liber Regalis*, then, however, proceeds to describe these "armillas" as hanging, "in the manner of a stole, about the neck and from each shoulder to the joints of the arms, where they are tied by silken bands, as may be more clearly seen by their structure," while further, the coronation order of Richard II., which was contemporaneous with the first-mentioned treatise, states that a stole was assumed by the Sovereign, immediately after the investing with the supertunic.

One, and one only, explanation seems possible, and even that is very far from being conclusive. It has been suggested that the royal stole at mediæval coronations may have been worn like that of a priest, *i.e.*, crossed upon the breast and tied about the level of the elbows with a girdle. Some show of probability is lent to this theory by the fact that among the vestments found upon the body of King Edward I. when his tomb was opened in 1774, there was a stole crossed upon the breast in the manner described. On the other hand, at the Coronation of Henry VII. the "armyll" was described as being made in manner of a stole "wovyn with gold and set with stones to be put by the Cardinal about the King's necke, and commyng from both shuldres to the King's elbows where it shalbe fastened by the said Abbot of Westminster with laces of silke on every elbowe in two places, that is to saye, about the elbowes and byneth." This direction must have been repeated in very nearly identical

language at James II.'s Coronation; for the Dean of Westminster seems to have "put it about his Majestie's neck, and tied it to the bowings of his arms above and below the elbows." The ribands of crimson taffeta, by which the stole was apparently fastened to the arms may still be seen in the "armyll" of the last mentioned monarch. Thus, the origin and function of the royal stole are both alike wrapped in mystery, while we are still completely baffled as to the remarkable grammatical process by which the plural noun "armillas" has come to denote a singular object!

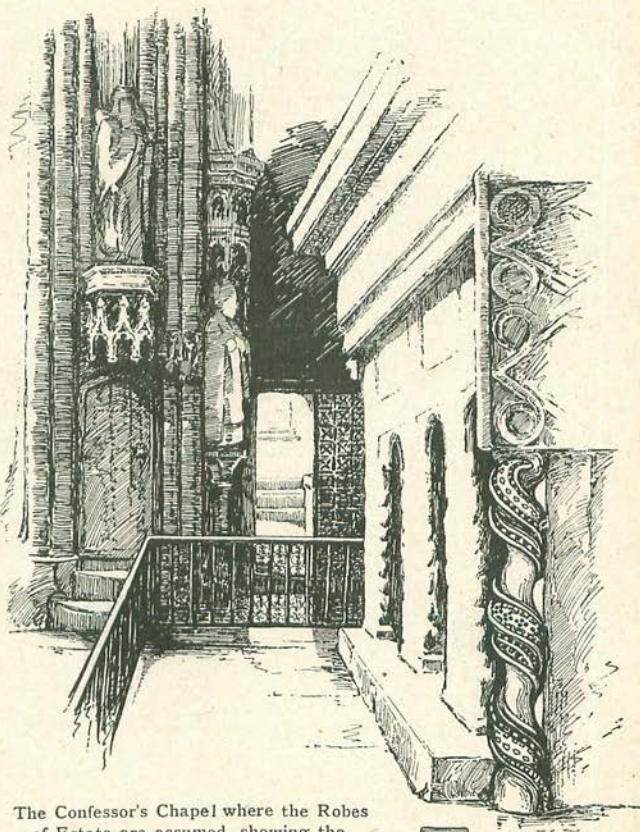
By far the most sumptuous and magnificent of all the silken vestments was the Imperial Mantle, also termed the "pallium regale," the "open pall," and the "dalmatic robe." In the ancient rubric of the *Liber Regalis* it is described as "four square (quadrum) and woven throughout with golden eagles." Its four points signify, to quote the prayer used when Charles II. was thus invested, that "the four corners of

the world are subject to the power of God, and that no man can happily reign upon earth who has not received his authority from Him." The golden eagles most probably symbolise the claim of the King of England to be Emperor of Britain and Lord of the Western Isles—a second world, as the people of a distant age fondly imagined. The special significance of these two features is thrown into marked prominence owing to the fact that the delivery of the orb—the symbol of dominion—accompanies this portion of the coronation rites.

In actual appearance, the Imperial Mantle is somewhat loosely described as being "in fashion of a cope." Sandford, the historian of James II.'s coronation, adds further: "The mantle has heretofore a rich embroidery with golden eagles, but this was stolen during the Civil Wars, and another was made for the ceremony of very rich gold and purple brocaded tissue, and outside being shot with gold thread, brocaded with gold and silver threads, with large flowers of gold frosted, heightened with some little silver flowers, all edged about with purple. The lining was of rich crimson Florence taffeta and the fastening a broad gold clasp." The Imperial Mantle worn by Queen Victoria was composed of cloth of gold. It was embroidered in a pattern of gold branches, interspersed with silver eagles, together with emblems more distinctively national in character—the rose, thistle, and shamrock, separated by silver fleurs-de-lys and coronets. It was edged with golden fringe, lined with rose-coloured silk, and fastened by means of a gilt morse.

The last of the coronation vestments are the scarlet gloves—corresponding to those worn by the episcopal order. They are provided by the Lord of the Manor of Worktop for the time being, and like the buskins and sandals, they are symbols of

dignity. Not only in the case of the gloves, but in all the silk vestments used during the coronation solemnity itself, the prevailing hue is scarlet. From time immemorial this colour has characterised the full dress apparel of bishops, judges, and doctors, no less than military officers and civil functionaries. Hence, the coronation vestments furnish no exception to an almost universal practice. It is difficult to trace the origin of this custom with any real certainty. One possible explanation, however, is to be found. In 1244, Pope Innocent IV. commanded that all cardinals should wear red hats. This order was extended in 1471 by Paul II. to the remainder of their official robes, "as the remembrance of the truth that Christ had purchased the Church with His own Blood," and as signifying the readiness of the wearer



The Confessor's Chapel where the Robes of Estate are assumed, showing the ruined shrine of St. Edward



to give his own life, if need be, for that same cause. Possibly, then, the crimson of the coronation vestments may be deduced from a similar sentiment, as implying that the Sovereign then pledges himself to surrender his very life-blood, should it be demanded, for the sake of his people. The coronation of Charles I. was remarkably prolific in ominous and even terrifying events. Scarcely anything, however, created so deep an impression as the substitution of robes of *white* velvet in preference to the time-honoured colour, together with the choice of a similar material for the decoration of the throne. Whether this selection was inspired by the normal colour for the Feast of the Purification, on which day his coronation took place, or by some fantastic notion on the part of Archbishop Laud, that white appropriately typified the royal innocence, or whether the true explanation be one of an infinitely more prosaic character, *e.g.*, the total failure in the supply of the material required, combined with the utter impossibility of procuring an adequate quantity from Genoa in time, the fact remains that Charles I. was solemnly "hallowed" in white—a hue believed, as far back as the age of Merlin, to possess the most unlucky import for the throne of England. When, after the lapse of some four and twenty troubled years, the same ill-starred monarch was led forth from the Banqueting-hall of his own palace, to lay down his life on behalf of the Church which he so ardently loved, men's thoughts harked back to his coronation, and called to mind the dismal woes predicted centuries

before, as destined to befall "the White King."

The processional vestments entitled the Parliament robes, which the Sovereign wears during his grand progress from Westminster Hall to the Abbey, have already been noticed. There still remain the Robes of Estate, which are laid upon St. Edward's altar in the Confessor's Chapel, and are there assumed by the Sovereign immediately upon the conclusion of the coronation service. In the "Device" for the coronation of Henry VII., his magnificent Robes of Estate are thus described: "The King, unaraied by his Chamberlayn of all his said regalles to his coote and shute, shalbe by the said Chamberlayn new arraued with hosen, sandallis, and other robes of state, that is to say, a surcote of purpill velwet close or open, furred with mynever pure, bordered with armyns, and ribbanded with gold at the colar, hands, and speris; a hode of estate furred with armyns poudred with armyns, with a greit lace of silke, and ij tarcellis purpill, and the King at his pleasur may were moo of his robes vndre his said mantell as a taberd. a kirtell or eny of them." Thus, it will be perceived, that the prevailing colour in the mantle and surcoat, comprising the Robes of Estate, is purple. This colour has for centuries been recognised as being the imperial colour *par excellence*. It points to the vast responsibilities which the Sovereign has taken upon himself during the solemnity in the Abbey, and which he has promised to discharge with faithful diligence for the remainder of his days.

