

Connor Riley

John II Comyn

Joint Crisis: First Scottish War of Independence

Character Background:

John II Comyn, also known as John “the Black” Comyn was the Lord of Badenoch and a member of one of the most powerful families in Scotland. When King Alexander III died, Margaret, Maid of Norway was deemed to be the rightful heir to the throne. Comyn was given the honor of becoming a Guardian of Scotland at this time. While he does have a claim to the throne, he has decided to support his brother in law John Balliol for the crown. His son, John III Comyn went on to play a crucial role in the war for Scottish Independence and is considered a critical figure in history. His castles and land are crucial in the infrastructure of Scotland, making him a very powerful figure.

Topic Background:

With the untimely death of Alexander III, the nation of Scotland was thrown into crisis. While Margaret, Maid of Norway eventually emerged as the rightful heir, the original unrest that occurred set the stage for much greater turmoil to come. In 1286, Margaret assumed the throne as Queen of Scotland and this seemed to be the end of things. By 1290 however, she too was also dead, a victim of weather and sickness on her boat. As she died in the Orkney Islands, things were already amiss. This posed a problem because her death marked the end of the royal line. Having no heirs herself, this created a power vacuum that two men were attempting to assume. John Balliol and Robert Bruce. Both men held strong claims to the throne and both believed their own to be superior. Balliol’s argument was that his relation was to the eldest daughter of the lineage, while Bruce’s claim was that despite the fact that his relation was to the younger daughter, he was fewer generations removed than Balliol. This debate raged on and on and brought the nation to the brink of civil war. Seeing no other option, they decided to seek mediation on the argument. For this, they turned to King Edward I, believing that he would be a trustworthy option. This however, proved to be false hope as Edward immediately saw an opportunity to gain authority over Scotland. He agreed that he would mediate the argument, but only under one condition. The new King of Scots would be required to swear their loyalty to England, which was essentially giving the entire kingdom away. As the king would be informed however, this would not work, as just being a mediator would not give him enough power to do this. He would not be stopped however, and he was a cunning man. In order to circumvent this requirement, he decided upon a new plan of action. Using all of his resources he was able to find any candidate with even a mild claim to the throne. By putting forth all of these candidates, he was able to alter his role, going from a simple mediator to a judge in the situation, a standing that held much more power under medieval law. This is how we have been placed in the predicament which we are now in, stuck between the desire for independence and the need for a ruling to avoid civil war.

Position:

With the first order of business of our committee being the choosing of a new king of scots, I will address this point first. While I may have a claim to the throne and am a very powerful figure, it would be improper for me to try and assert authority over the throne as my brother-in-law, John Balliol, has a much stronger claim than I. Many men have come forward expressing their desire to assume this position of power, especially Robert Bruce, but not one of them has the strength of claim that my brother does. He is a good and wise man and would do the kingdom of Scotland well and serve them faithfully. This being said, we also have other matter to attend to. King Edward has made an attempt to mettle in Scottish affairs and assert authority over our nation that he has no right to. Unless he withdraws his clause of suzerainty from his agreement to judge our conflict, then we will have no choice but to withdraw our request for his help. Under no circumstances can we allow the Crown of England to gain any sort of foothold in our great kingdom. This must be our course of action, for if one of us is to deviate and accept the king's authority, we will all be forced to follow suit if we have any hope of keeping our bids at the crown. Instead, I propose that we go to a more neutral body who will not have any personal stake in the winner of the crown. For this, I believe that the Bishop of Glasgow would be by far the best option. As a member of the clergy he is honest and true. He will give us a just ruling and allow Scotland to prosper once again, free of any influence from the British Crown. Our last order of business is to decide whether we as a nation want to ensure our independence from England. As evidenced above, I think the only path for our country is to stay independent from England. We are completely capable of supporting ourselves without their help, and to act as though we need it is foolish. It is even more cowardly to submit to English authority out of fear for them. If we are to preserve the glory of our fathers and their fathers before them, then we cannot allow England to hold authority over our lands. I firmly believe that the best path for Scotland moving forward is to be a fully independent nation. We have the resources and the will to do so. I know that there are members of the committee that are behind me on this, including the man I believe to be our future king, John Balliol.