

LECTURE II.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

IT was the chief object of my former discourse, to lay before you a succinct account of the rise, progress, and decline of the art of engraving, as it was practised among the most celebrated nations of antiquity, on gems, and other costly and durable materials. I have now to advert to another occasion, where Engraving employed her twofold power to multiply and perpetuate, perhaps with still greater advantage to society; and thence to trace her ameliorating progress through the dark ages that succeeded the downfall of the Roman empire.

Though battles and massacres have been detailed with the distressing accuracy of barbarians who delighted to anticipate that other barbarians would enjoy the bloody repast they had provided, it is unpleasing

to reflect that the progress of the arts of refinement has often been carelessly noticed as only of collateral and inferior importance, or has been altogether omitted by the ancient poets and historians. Modern literature has been more just to their merits : Addison has written expressly " on the usefulness of ancient medals," which is the subject immediately before us, and the lyre of Pope has sounded in its praise.

The invention of coining was not only a very curious and useful adaptation of the art of engraving to the purposes of society, but is an important event in the history of the world. Stamping impressions on medals and money, was a mode of printing the most eminently calculated to resist the attacks of time, and also a mode of circulating and transmitting information, the most certain, because itself constituted the woof that gave texture to commerce, and strength and extension to the bands of civil society. If Truth, therefore, be the basis of History, as surely it is, History must appear to have been peculiarly ungrateful to an art of

which it may be no hyperbole to say that it has contributed more than all other arts to the detection of remote error, and the verification of fact: for, notwithstanding these its extensive energies, and this its inestimable importance, it is not known when or in what country money first became the substitute for cattle, and unstamped bullion, as the general representative of property and the measure of value. The Egyptians do not appear to have had any, while they remained an independent people: none is mentioned in history, and none has been found in Egypt, excepting certain small thin pieces of unstamped gold, the supposed fares of the Stygian ferryman, in the mouths of the mummies; and even of this fact, though it be mentioned by Pinkerton, there is reason to doubt. The Assyrians, the ancient Hebrews, and even the Greeks of the age of Agamemnon, appear to have been equally ignorant of the art of coining money, and to have used cattle and bullion upon commercial occasions: from the time of Abraham's purchasing the cave of Machpelah, down to a very late period, the Scriptures

refer to the scales as a current test of the value of metals;* and Homer says the armour of Diomed† cost only nine oxen, while that which Glaucus generously gave in exchange for it cost an hundred.

Montesquieu says that the Lydians first found out the art of coining money. The wealth of their kings, and particularly of Croesus, is still proverbial, and perhaps from this very circumstance: but Pinkerton,‡ who appears to have considered the subject attentively, is at last doubtful whether Lydia, or whether Egina, or any other of the free commercial cities of Greece, may claim the honour of the invention. His reasoning on the subject, as it throws light on the general progress of art, may not be unworthy of your notice. He says, there is great room to believe that coinage was invented in Lydia, though other na-

* Genesis, ch. 23.

† Iliad, Book vi.

‡ See his essay on medals, from which I have borrowed largely, and where the reader may still collect much valuable information on the subject.

tions had before this, used unstamped pieces of metal, and the small civic coins of gold, electrum, and silver, struck in Asia Minor, are perhaps some of the earliest, though, *if* we may judge from workmanship, these coins are so exquisite, that the coins of Greece, from their rudeness, appear to claim priority of era. In short, all other countries are out of the question, but whether Greece or Lydia first invented coinage seems dubious.

Now the Lydians were of the same origin with the Greeks, both being of Thrace; and it is not improbable, that with equal ingenuity, and a soil far more propitious, the Lydians were the real parents of many Grecian arts. The recollection that the Etruscans were a Lydian colony, appears strongly to confirm this supposition; yet I must add, that the rudeness of the engraving affords no solid, invariable criterion, either of the antiquity of the coin, or the general state of art in the country where it was struck; for while the coins of Sicily, and even those of the remote colony which

settled at Cyrene in Africa during the heroic ages, are engraven with exquisite skill, the Athenian coins of the same date are invariably ill executed, though Athens was at that time the centre of art and politeness.

On the whole, it is probable that the Lydians invented, and the Greeks very soon adopted, the art of engraving dies and stamping money. Its great and obvious commercial advantages, and the similarity of the reverses on the coins of both countries, which, (if I might indulge a conjecture on such a subject) appears to be intended to spare the trouble of weighing, by denoting the value of the coin, seem to countenance this opinion.

Of these early coins there are eleven on silver in the late Dr. Hunter's cabinet, and they are not uncommon elsewhere, bearing the tortoise, the badge of the Peloponnesus, in cameo, on one side, and on the other, those remarkable indented squares which correspond with the reverses of the Lydian money, and which, if they did not mark

the weight or standard goodness of the silver, were perhaps only the impression of a sort of small square anvil, grooved at right angles, so as to keep the bullet of silver steady beneath, and prevent it from slipping, while it was struck or stamped from above. The earliest of these coins have no legends or inscriptions on the squares, but it seems to have been soon perceived that the reverse, as well as the obverse, might be made to convey information, and on those which were struck soon after, where the tortoise is executed in a better style, a small dolphin is engraven on one of the indented squares, and on two of the others is an inscription of four Greek characters, which Mr. Pinkerton supposes an abbreviation of Egina; where, according to some authors, the first Greek money was struck, by Phidon king of the Argives. Phidon's reign is fixed by the Arundelian Marbles, which are themselves among the most celebrated and valuable of engraven records, at about eight centuries before the Christian era, or soon after the age of Homer.

Some have supposed that the art of engraving dies was known at a much earlier period in Hindoostan, and in the Numismatic collection now forming by the Honourable East-India Company, is a gold coin which was found among the treasures of Tippoo Sultân, to which the Hindoos paid a superstitious homage, and assigned an antiquity of upwards of four thousand years. It was understood to have been formerly dug up near the royal palace of Mysore; like some of the coins of our own Cunobelin, it is disked, but to a much greater depth; and within the concavity is the figure of Rama,* a sovereign and deity incarnate of the Hindoos, who is said to have reigned forty centuries ago. He is represented as seated on a throne, with his wife Seeta, and attended by Hunnoomaun, a sort of familiar spirit who accompanied Rama in the form of a monkey in his wars against

* The Hindoo's had at least three Ramas, the Bow-man, the Plough-man, and the Hatchet-man, who were probably the authors, or introducers, of these several inventions.

Ceylon; and on each side of the throne are engraven three figures, holding the umbrella and the cowtail-fan, the emblems of Hindoo royalty.

On the reverse, or convex side of this curious coin or medal, is a horoscope, and in a very ancient Sanscreeet character, the name *Nārāyana Pāla*: in all probability the horoscope and name of the sovereign in whose reign it was really struck. The whole is engraven in very low relief, and the two triangles which form the horoscope, are evidently done with a small flat scoper. Though it is in low relief, its concavity, its being of gold, and the veneration which has been paid this coin, has preserved its workmanship tolerably entire, and from a MS of Major Allen, which accompanied it from India, I learn that other coins, of the same kind, though not all impressed from the same die, have sometimes been seen in Hindoostan; but they are very rare, and like the penates or household-gods of most ancient nations, are revered

and decorated with flowers by their fortunate possessors.

The very learned superintendant of the Honourable Company's museum, however, by no means concurs in this opinion of the very remote antiquity of the Mysore coin, and thinks that others in the same collection are probably much older: these are also of gold, but in a style of art very superior to this, and somewhat resembling the early Greek.

It was the common policy, and is still the general custom, of the Orientals, to connect religion with royalty in the devices which they adopted for their money. Hence deities and sovereigns, either named or represented, commonly appear on the same coin. On one of these of which we are treating, is a figure which Mr. Wilkins supposes to be that of Rama the bowman, who was one of the Bacchuses of India, and who is represented standing with his bow, and attended by a mythological eagle, which bears a considerable resemblance to that on the standards of ancient Rome. An en-

throned deity sits on the reverse, holding the reins of government in one hand, and in the other a cornucopia, with his head surrounded by a halo or circle of glory.

On the whole, though there may be great room to conjecture, there is at present none to conclude, that the numismatic art is of Hindoo origin: but every information on this interesting subject may reasonably be hoped from the learning, zeal, and assiduity of those who now preside over the departments of oriental art and literature.

A coin once seen, particularly if attended with the rude and clumsy appearances of early contrivance, would suggest to an ingenious mind the means of its production. If, therefore, but a single Hindoo coin can now be produced, the date of which is unquestionably earlier than the first Greek or Lydian money, the honour of the invention should be awarded to India, and it would presumptively follow, that it travelled with

the precious stones from the Asiatic continent.

However this may have been, the frequent intercourse which then subsisted, soon spread the art of die-engraving through Greece, and each of her commercial cities learned to impress on its coins its respective symbol. Athens had an owl, Thessaly a horse, and Argos a wolf's head.* The same crescent which then shone on the coins of Byzantium still waves on the Turkish banner, and its adoption originated in the signal repulse of Philip of Macedon : Philip was about to storm Byzantium † on a cloudy night, when the moon suddenly shining out, disclosed his intention, and enabled the citizens to defeat his project. The moon, Hecate, or Diana, was hence venerated as the bearer of light, and preserver of Byzantium, and when the Turks possessed themselves of the city, ignorantly suspi-

* See Pinkerton on Medals, vol. i. p. 192, where many other ancient Greek symbols are mentioned.

† *Historia Byzantina Constantinopolis Christiana*, lib. i. p. 7.

scious of lurking magic, they thought to propitiate its unknown powers, by assuming the symbol.

Montesquieu however argues, from Herodotus, and his own observation of the Pembroke cabinet, that the *earliest* Athenian coins bore the impression of the ox, which it originally represented in value, and Dr. Henry* says the earliest coins of all countries are embossed with the figures of the cattle for which they became the substitute as a current measure of value; he seems even to regard this circumstance as a test of the antiquity of coins: but as the use of unstamped bullion, the value of which must have been estimated by its weight and degree of purity, preceded the invention of coining, it is at least as rational to suppose that the inventors, or those who first availed themselves of this art, would be solicitous that the weight, and consequent value of money, should be known by inspection.

* Hist. of Great Britain, vol. i. p. 402, 403.

Many of these early Greek coins, which may still be seen in the cabinets of the curious, are beautifully executed, and in high relief; but, as I have already observed, notwithstanding the general superiority of Athenian art, the coins of Athens are a remarkable exception, exhibiting no better specimens of this supreme degree of excellence, than do the notes of the existing banks of Europe of the perfection of the modern art of engraving on copper. In this particular respect, therefore, as well as in many others, those who are entrusted with the direction of these important national concerns, are perfectly *Attic*—not that I should have mentioned this circumstance for the mere sake of introducing a *compliment*, though it be *well deserved*; but while these gentlemen, neglecting to avail themselves and their respective countries, of the talent and ingenuity which they might command, seem to wait for a miracle to preserve them from forgery, others may be allowed to think it *no miracle* if they are *not* preserved.

In order to account for this inferiority of

the Athenian coinage, it has been conjectured that the die-engravers of Athens were so much admired, and so anxiously sought for, abroad, that there were no good ones left at home: but, an artist who is conscious of possessing great powers, will rather employ those powers on imperishable materials, such as the costly oriental stones, than on works where the obliteration of his merit is in proportion to its usefulness, and where every day's friction, by impairing the beauty and delicacy of his execution, brings the most exalted talents nearer to the level of the meanest.

On the great artists of Athens, ever alive to posthumous glory, such sentiments as these must have had considerable influence, and if they found encouragement in gem-engraving, we need not be much surprised that they left the dies to those of inferior talent. Again, from the great number, and almost equally great variety, of Athenian coins now in existence, it would appear that their dies were of some soft metal, easily cut, and soon worn out, and that the

cheapest, and consequently worst, workmen, would on this account have been employed, even though the best had not been more agreeably and more reputably engaged. In short, die-engraving appears not to have been honoured at Athens as an art, but regarded merely as a common trade.*

The operation of coining was at that time performed† simply by the stroke of a ham-

* I am here so powerfully reminded of the state of modern engraving in this country, that if my hopes, notwithstanding recent occurrences, were not stronger than my reasoning, I should say that the same fate is even now in operation, and will inevitably befall the art of engraving on copper, for principle is immutable. The present race of engravers, if they may claim that honour, are probably the last that will be honoured with the appellation of artists: mere manual dexterity and visual accuracy, will be substituted to the high mental requisites of the art, and the less enlightened part of posterity will view with surprise the wretched engravings that England will produce, long before the close of the nineteenth century.

† It is to this day performed in the same manner, and die-engraving, with the same clumsy facility, in such parts of the world as are not in a state of improvement. A friend of mine, who was collecting materials illustrative of the costume of India, visited the mint at Patna, and while he

mer, the die being cut on a sort of punch. Apparently there was more than one reverse engraved on the same piece of metal, and in the carelessness of hasty striking, the workmen sometimes let the bullion slip aside, in which cases we see, as is not uncommon on old coins, that the reverse and obverse have not coincided, and that with an incomplete reverse appears part of the curve of another: perhaps, too, the same row of reverses were not all of the same subject, and thence one source of the variety of the coins of Athens. It may also be worth remembering, that the bullion was not cut into cylindrical pieces, as is now the practice, but, as I have before intimated, each piece was of a spherical form, which accounts for the very high relief by which some of the coins and medals of antiquity are distinguished, and also for the cracked edges we so frequently observe in

was making a drawing of the place, a die or punch was engraved, with the initials of his name, and twelve impressions were presented to him at his departure.

old coins, proceeding from the force of the blow which became requisite.

I conceive that in the ordinary course of ancient money-coining, a row of balls of bullion was hastily placed, and presumptively in a heated state,* in a row of matrices by one workman, another held the punch over them in quick succession, which a third struck with a large sledgehammer.

The Lydian colony which settled in Etruria is supposed to have carried thither the art of coining, and to have communicated it to the Romans in the reign of Servius Tullus, or about four hundred and sixty years before the commencement of our æra. The early coins of both Etruria and Rome, are not struck with a hammer, but cast; nor are they of gold and silver, as the Greek, but of copper and brass, and

* I am informed that Mr. R. P. Knight has a Sicilian coin, which exhibits the appearance of the metal having run, from being over-heated.

both are impressed with the rude figures of cattle, from whence the Latin term *pecunia* is derived.

On the reverses of those Etruscan coins whose obverse is an ox or a bull, is a device which has been thought to resemble the bones of a fish, and which has given rise to various opinions. Reflecting on this singular mark, and on Dr. Henry's general assertion,* I have been induced to *add*, though *not much*, to the numerous conjectures respecting it. I think it *may* have been intended to denote the fractional part of the value of an ox, for which it was current; because, though these coins are large and heavy, their material is only copper, which could not, as Montesquieu and Dr. Henry, if literally interpreted, would suggest, render them of equal value with an ox.

Again, Etruria at that time had no nu-

* That the earliest coins of all countries are marked with the figures of cattle.

merals: this mark may therefore have been used to denote the number of nails, or arrows, or some other simple and portable species of property, which had also been in use as money among the native inhabitants before the arrival of the Lydian colony, and for the value of which these pieces became current. Cattle could not have been used for the more trifling purchases in any country, without manifest inconvenience. No man would give an ox, or even a kid, for a hide or a basket. Property less valuable, or more portable and divisible in its nature, must therefore have been also in use as a circulating medium; and as salt is said to be thus used in Abyssinia, and cowries on the coast of Africa, so it is more than possible that nails and arrow-heads were occasionally used by the orientals as money, in their smaller purchases. The learned author of the "Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations," who has amplified the inconvenience of using cattle as an instrument of commerce with his usual perspicacity, speaks of a village in Scotland, where, in his time, it was

not uncommon for workmen to carry nails, as money, to the baker's shop or the ale-house.

It is digressing from our proper subject, yet it may not be unworthy of collateral notice, that nails, or the heads of arrows, thus used as money by the aborigines of Assyria, (who had no coinage, though they had engravers) may possibly have been the remote origin of numerical, logographic, and finally of alphabetic characters. The present art of writing, or of transmitting thought by sound, and depicting sound by intricate combinations of abstract forms, though associated in infancy with little difficulty, is too vast and complicated for the human mind to have accomplished but by degrees. Perhaps three nails, or arrows, accidentally or designedly disposed in a triangle, or any other supposed form, might have suggested to some Babylonian genius, that the engraved representation of three nails thus combined, might be made to signify the basket or piece of pottery, to which they bore some resemblance in shape, and were

equivalent in value: the same genius would readily infer, that the same number of nails, when combined in some other form, a zig-zag, for example, might, upon the same principle, be made to denote some other commodity or article of traffic of equal value, and thus, the known value of a thing might become current, or represent in engraving or writing, as well as in commerce, the thing itself. It is true that these consequences could only result from mutual compact, and if any disagreement should happen between the parties concerned, it would give rise to such a confusion of written, though not of oral, language, as we read did actually take place about this time in the plain of Shinaar. But it is time to return from the obscurity of conjecture, to better authenticated facts.

On the coins of some of the cities and colonies of Greece, the art has transmitted many interesting and exquisite examples of beauty, and of the charms of their poetical mythology; but she learned the most useful application of her powers under Ro-

man auspices. Under Roman auspices she became the auxiliary of history, and learned to commemorate events; and to communicate the wisdom and the virtues, with the portraits, of the statesman, the hero, and the sage: but, under Roman auspices, she was also compelled to stoop and prostitute her powers in flattering the most unworthy of mankind. The Virtues appear without impropriety on the medals of Nerva, Trajan, Adrian, and the Antonines, but what shall we say to *Clemency* and *Moderation* being represented on the coins of Tiberius? or to the legend which states, that "while Commodus reigns, the world is blest?" Has adulation been so extremely abject? or have the conductors of the Roman coinage dared to be ironical under the most sanguinary and disgusting of tyrants?

The establishment of the Roman mint was on a scale corresponding with the importance of the empire. The engravers were respected, as conducting in the exercise of their art, both to the strength and ornament of the state, and were styled *Cæ-*

latores: those who assayed the bullion were called *Spectatores*, and the refiners *Cenarii*. Beside whom there were the *Fusarii*, or melters; the *Equatores Monetarum*, who adjusted the weight; the *Suppostores*, who put the pieces into the dies, and the *Malleatores*, who struck them.* At some time it should seem that other implements than hammers, were used by the Romans to strike their money. Bouteroue says, that in a grotto near Baiæ was a picture of the Roman mintage, where a machine was represented which upheld a large weight, seemingly with the intent that the coin should be impressed by its fall.

The best of the Roman medals, as well as gems, are the work of Greek artists: and the best dies were cut during the reign of Adrian, when genius, discouraged from her nobler flights, seemed for a while to have taken up her residence in the Roman mint.

* Some other officers, who were appointed at different periods of the empire, are enumerated by Pinkerton, with his usual accuracy. See *Essay on Medals*, vol. i. p. 51. to 54.

The personification of our own island first appeared on the Roman imperial coins. On those of Claudius, Adrian, Antoninus Pius, Commodus, and Severus, the Britanias are numerous, and it is worthy of remark, that she appears in a style, and accompanied by attributes, which may appear to a native of this island, prophetic of her present grandeur and importance—seated on a globe, on a rock, or on the Gram-pian hills; or standing erect, her right hand resting on a rudder, with a ship's prow in the back-ground.

It has been the earnest wish of many distinguished characters, among whom we may recollect with advantage the names of Pope and Addison, and, if I heard aright, that of your lecturer on history, that this country would adopt the ancient practice of commemorating important events on the reverses of its coins. I do not see that any other than beneficial consequences, both to present and future times, could result from its adoption, and we have now

an engraver at the head of the mint, whose talents are fully adequate to the task.

Surely it would be not less gratifying to the statesman or the admiral, to see his great deeds interwoven with the vital threads of that commerce which they had promoted, than to anticipate what may be sculptured on his monument. The real *King's Arms* is the British thunder! and it might thus continue to reverberate through time and space, when it is either successfully wielded at the the mouth of the Nile, or launched on the Atlantic ocean. Warmed by such wishes, the muse of Mr. Pope breaks forth with more than her accustomed fervour.

“ Oh when shall Britain, conscious of her claim,
Stand emulous of Greek and Roman fame?
In living medals see her *Wars* enrolled.”

Pope was, however, very far from wishing that *only* victories should be thus recorded: he knew that a thousand battles might be rendered useless, or worse than useless, by a single thought of a man or woman of genius, and would have blushed

to have found it necessary to compare (their real advantage to society being the test) the discoveries of Locke, Bacon, or Sir Isaac Newton, with the most brilliant victories that were ever obtained. Had he lived in our time, he would probably have desired that a coin should be struck when Cooke returned from circumnavigating the globe; or when a tedious and destructive war was terminated by an honourable peace; or when Great Britain was politically united to Ireland; or when the Royal, British, or London Institutions were established. Genius in art, science, or literature, is more rare, as well as more intrinsically valuable, than in war: Garrick has well observed, that,

“ we have thousands that fight ;
But one, only one, like our Shakespear can write :”

and if Pope has dwelt with less heroic effort, he has not dwelt with less obvious pleasure, upon the arts of adornment, than upon those of destruction. With the zeal of a poet and a philosopher, in which we may honestly join, he is desirous that the

verse and sculpture should bear an equal part,

“ And art reflects its images *on art!*”

and the sincerity of his attachment to the union of patriotic with private virtue, is evinced by the conclusion of his epistle; where he is also desirous that a distinguished states man, who had shewn himself the common friend of art and man, should shine on the prest ore.

Not to occupy too much of your time and attention with numismatic concerns, I must here omit even a brief notice of the various exertions and vicissitudes which the civilized world has seen, of this very useful and interesting department of engraving, in order to approximate toward that which is more particularly the object of our discourses.

Of the art of engraving *so as to yield numerous impressions*, the intaglio gem-engraving of the ancients is the root, and die-sinking is the earliest scion. To follow the latter through all its various ramifications is not necessary on the present occasion,

neither do I profess to be qualified to speak critically of the productions of either of these arts; but to say thus much appeared indispensable in the view I had taken of this part of my subject, which is designed to exhibit a sort of genealogical succession of those causes and effects which have preceded and produced, that mode of sculpture performed by incision, which we now technically and specifically term ENGRAVING.

How early the art revived, or whether it was indigenous or transplanted, among the Celtic and Gothic nations, might be difficult to determine. The uncouth poetry and shapeless sculpture of those progenitors of modern Europe, are to be seen in almost every region of the globe, from Caucasus to the northern extremities of Siberia. Indeed, so interwoven are the elements of art with the nature of man, that it may be said there is scarcely a spot either in the old or new world, and scarcely an island in the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean, but exhibits efforts in engraving and the other arts of perpetuity, more or less rude or refined.

That it was rudely practised by our war-like ancestors from the earliest periods, is attested by that very intelligent antiquary and artist, the late Mr. Strutt; he says, that their instruments of war, and other remains found in the British and Saxon tumuli, frequently bear marks of the graver; and the numerous coins of Cunobelin, must satisfy every one of the existence of this species of engraving, as early as the reign of that monarch—the father of Caractacus.

After passing the distressing period of Roman and Danish ravages, the soul of an Englishman flutters with fond delight over the name and the memory of Alfred, and seems to hold dalliance with all that is dear to his loyal and patriotic feelings. “Under the protection of that excellent monarch,” says Strutt, “the arts began to manifest themselves in a superior degree. He not only encouraged such artists as were in England at the time, but invited others from abroad; and the works of the Anglo-Saxon goldsmiths, (the principal engravers of that day) were held in the highest esteem

upon the continent, as well as in their native country. The shrines and caskets which they made for the preservation of the reliques of saints and other pious purposes, are said to have been curiously wrought in gold, silver, and other metals; ornamented with precious stones, and engravings in so excellent a style as to excite the admiration of all who saw them." Mr. Strutt proceeds with an earnest wish that a sufficient number of specimens of the works of the artists of this early period could be procured, by which a complete judgment might be formed of the degree of perfection to which they had arrived. There is however, yet preserved in the museum at Oxford, a very valuable jewel, richly adorned with a kind of work resembling fillagree, in the midst of which is seen the half figure of a man, supposed to be St. Cuthbert; and the back of this curious remnant of antiquity is ornamented with foliage, very skilfully engraved. This jewel is known to have been made at the command of Alfred the Great, and was one of the very few articles he could have carried with him

when he retreated to the isle of Athelney, where it has since been found.*

Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury, who died in the year 988, is mentioned by the early historians as an artist. He painted and worked in the precious metals, frequently adorning his works with images and letters which he engraved thereon. Osborn, his biographer, calls him the first of engravers; but it has been emphatically observed, that he who could add the title of saint to the name of Dunstan, would not hesitate to call him a Raphael in painting, or an Audran in engraving; and the specimen of his drawing preserved in the Bodleian library, leaves us little to regret in the entire loss of his engravings.

Since I had the honour of addressing you last year, it has been pointed out to me that I had then omitted all particular notice of the engraved metal seals or signets of the

* Mr. Strutt has given a faithful representation of it, in the second volume of his Chronicle of England.

middle ages, and the revival or introduction of the practice of *sealing* in England. This is certainly no unimportant branch of the genealogical tree, and I shall hope to apologize for its not appearing then, by engrafting it now.

It is perhaps not totally unconnected with this revival, that the custom of ratifying grants of land by a seal, prevailed at a still earlier period in the peninsula of India, where not only the matrix of the seal, but the whole deed of transfer was also engraven, on a plate or tablet of metal. One of these, which is a grant of land, in the Sanscreeet language, and now in the possession of the Right Hon. the Earl of Mansfield, has been inserted with an English translation by Mr. Wilkins, in the first volume of the Asiatic researches.* It is dated twenty-three years before the birth of Christ, and it is further remarkable, that the date is expressed in *Hindoo numerals*, which for the most part very much resemble the numerals at present in use.

* P. 123, &c.

Another of these grants, of nearly the same age, which is likewise engraven in (the Sanscreeet language) on copper, and which the same oriental scholar has undertaken to translate, has a seal appendant, which seal is impressed on a ponderous lump of copper; and is attached to the deed itself by a massy ring of the same metal.

It appears to me, on a careful inspection, that this seal is not cast, (as had been supposed) but is struck, as coins are struck: but whether it be cast or struck, the matrix must have been an intaglio engraving, and of no mean workmanship. It exhibits a style of art similar, and not inferior, to the best of the present productions of the art of Hindoostan. It is in high relief, and, being bedded in the metal, in good preservation. Its subject is mythological; * its form a circle, of about ten inches in circumference, and the weight of the copper on which it is stamped, not less than four or five pounds.

* Beside human figures and animals, it contains a Sanscreeet legend, or inscription, of which the meaning is simply "the Illustrious Karna Déva."

In apology for this particularity of description I must add, that at the time I wrote it, I did not expect to have been able to exhibit the seal and plates themselves, which, by favour of Mr. Neave of Wimpole-street, I am now enabled to do. They were presented to that gentleman by Merza Hazy, grandson of Shah Alum, the present emperor of Hindoostan, and were found in digging a foundation within the scite of the ancient fort of Benares, on the banks of the Ganges.

On the whole, this seal may be regarded as a highly interesting example of ancient Hindoo engraving, and is itself evidence, that at the time when it was executed, the art was very far from being in its infancy.

That the custom of sealing in Europe is derived from Hindoostan, I neither presume to assert nor deny. Those who may incline to the negative opinion, will yet perceive, that these Hindoo grants connect themselves with our subject, as being the oldest engravings of that country, of which the exact date is ascertained, and as carrying back the existence of the art in India, to a

a more remote, but indefinite period. The existence of numerals in India a thousand years before they were known in Europe, is also remarkable; yet, notwithstanding these, and that the practice of sealing on lead was introduced into Europe about the same time as the numerals,* there is reason to suppose that sealing may have been derived immediately from the Romans, who, as well as the Greeks, are known to have been scrupulously observant of the custom of sealing their letters.

Pursuing this supposition, it would appear that some sparks of light were elicited from hostile collision; and that though Christianity and the northern nations had overthrown and buried the religion and the political institutions of ancient Rome in promiscuous ruin, engraved seals continued, where the least information remained, to be necessary to the ratification of legal transac-

* Both sealing, and the nine numerals, which we are supposed to have obtained from the Arabs, may possibly have been brought from India by means of the Saracens.

tions, and the secrecy of written correspondence: they served alike to shelter ignorance, and to display or expose the inconsiderable remains of European taste and intelligence: he who could not subscribe his name, might affix his seal; and he who could, might shew his knowledge and his judgment, or the extent of his power, in the device he adopted, or was able to procure.

Of these seals, some were raked up from the ruins of departed greatness, others revealed the poverty of the talent of Christendom, and both descriptions attested the miserable state to which the knowledge of classic art and literature were reduced. Pepin* of France sealed with an Indian Bacchus, and Charlemagne† sometimes with

* The reader will find this, with many other curious and valuable facts relative to ancient engraving, in Raspe's preface to Tassie's Catalogue.

† The seal of this brave and powerful prince, formed the pommel of his sword, and he was accustomed to say, "With the point I will support what I have sealed with the hilt."

a head of Jupiter Serapis, which it has been conjectured they mistook for St. Peter and St. Paul; and in Lewis's curious tract on the subject of ancient seals, is an account of an antique gem, which happening to contain *three* figures, was *christened* the Holy Trinity, and used as a seal.

It may be presumed, however, that many Christian gems remained in use, Clemens* of Alexandria having long before this period, and while the art of engraving on gems was still poorly practised, exhorted his fellow-labourers in the gospel to reject pagan and use religious symbols, such as the monogram of Jesus, a dove, a fish, an anchor, the ark of Noah, or the boat of St. Peter: of the latter subject Lewis has copied an impression, where St. Peter is represented in the act of drawing his net—a seal with which some of the early popes were accustomed to sanction their bulls.

The beautiful art of engraving on gems

* Clemens lived about the close of the second century.

might be contemned by the ignorance, while money, and the means of issuing it, would be eagerly retained by the avarice and the ambition of those who had seized on the shattered fragments of the Western empire. A gem would have broken under the force necessary to impress it on metal, whilst iron or brass would receive and transmit the shock without injury: hence, while gem-engraving shrunk from the inclemency of the times, the hardier art of die-engraving remained—barbarised and debased indeed, but not extinct.

The Roman sealing-substance, and the art of engraving on gems, disappeared about the same time. What this substance was, I am not able precisely to say. It is described, not very intelligibly, as being “a kind of chalk or soft earth,” which the Romans imported from Asia, and moistened with saliva, (as wafers are moistened at present) to receive the impression. It is not improbable that the means of obtaining this substance, or perhaps the knowledge of the substance itself, was lost in the darkness of

the middle ages, and no adequate substitute presenting itself, they had recourse to lead.

Lead is known to have been used in our own country, for the purpose of sealing, by St. Austin,* the monk, who lived at the close of the sixth and beginning of the seventh centuries: it is *supposed* to have been used one hundred and fifty years afterward by king Offa, and presumptively continued in use wherever sealing was practised in Europe, till about the beginning of the eleventh century.

I have purposely expressed myself with some doubt respecting the seal of Offa, because, though my Lord Coke has said that the chirograph or charter of King Offa,

* W. de Thorne affirms that Austin the monk used to seal on lead, and that they had in the monastery named after him, a seal antiently belonging to some foreign bishop, inscribed *Sigillum protomartyris Stephani*, which may, without much hazard of mistake, be classed with the reliques of the day, as an instrument of pious fraud. Both ~~these~~ seals were presumptively brought from Rome.

whereby he granted Peter-pence* to support an English school at Rome, "doth yet remain *under seal*," yet Madox has denied this, and thinks *if* it could be seen, it would appear to be a forgery. That it was a forgery may be presumed, but has never yet been proved; and that it could be seen in Somner's time, is evident from a MS note of his in that copy of the first volume of Sir Henry Spelman's Councils, which belongs to the library of Christ-Church, Canterbury; wherein he has written that "Offa's charter is with the primate of Ireland," but Lewis, who gives this anecdote, adds, that Somner "does not say it is under a seal of wax, more probable it is that the seal is of lead, if there be any."

Ingulphus, the learned abbot of Croyland,

* These Peter-pence were to be paid annually by every family in his kingdom whose yearly income was not less than thirty pence. I have read that Offa was born deaf, and lame, and blind: the number of kingly works that are ascribed to him, teach us rather to think that he had better ears, stronger limbs, and keener eyes, than his contemporaries.

(who had been a great traveller, and was secretary to William the Conqueror) says that the Normans, disliking the English manner of ratifying their chirographs, ordered them to be confirmed by impressions *on wax*, from the special seals of every one of the parties, and attested by witnesses. From his testimony it appears, that seals were by no means common in England. Probably, as invaders are generally unenlightened, this country was more deeply in the shades of ignorance than the rest of Europe, and the art of engraving them had scarcely dawned here before the time of Alfred. Ingulphus expressly says, that lands were *formerly* granted or disposed of without writing; sometimes by word of mouth; sometimes a turf of the land granted was laid with religious ceremony on the holy altar; and sometimes the lord gave to the tenant, a sword, bow, helmet, arrow, or drinking-horn,* to certify the transfer.

* Lewis says, that a Mr. Pyssey of Berkshire, had in his possession a drinking-horn inscribed, "I King Knoute (Canute) have given thee this horn to hold thy land by."

Recollecting Alfred's jewel, which, with its curiously engraved setting, I have already mentioned, it would appear that the means of engraving metal seals could scarcely have been unknown here in the time of Ingulphus. Perhaps seals were sometimes used, though not impressed on *wax*. Dugdale has observed, that Edward the Confessor's charter to the Abbey of Westminster *is sealed*, "and is the first of the kind we have in this kingdom:" but as this prince is known to have received his education in Normandy, it is more than possible that he may have introduced, among other Norman usages, this of ratifying charters by a seal of *wax*.

The seal of William the Conqueror is still appendant to the charter by which he endowed Battle Abbey, and may be seen in the Cottonian Library. Its style of design and workmanship, as might be expected, is heraldic, graceless, and dry: its subject, a knight,* or more probably a duke, in

* Du Fresne says, that anciently in France noblemen acquired the privilege of sealing at the age of twenty-one,

complete armour; with the king crowned, a sword in his right hand, and a globe surmounted by a cross in his left, on the reverse.

From this period, the use and sacredness of seals, went on increasing in the public estimation, so that by the time of Henry I. their devices, forms, and sizes, appropriated to the different ranks in society, were gradually settled—even the etiquette of sealing on different coloured waxes, was ascertained with sufficient scrupulosity.

I have examined the brass matrix of a seal which was used during the reign of that monarch, which is in good preservation, and now in the possession of the reverend and learned Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries. It is an intaglio of considerable depth, appears to be the work of some die-sinker of that period, and to have been

at which time they were knighted, and that esquires did not obtain it till the year 1376, and when they were created knights altered their seals.

executed partly with gravers and scorpers, and partly with punching implements. It belonged to Walter de Banham sacrist of St. Edmundsbury, and represents the head of St. Edmund the king and martyr; a wolf; and a tree resembling an artichoke: but the head is larger than the wolf, and scarcely less than the tree, and the whole is surrounded by the rhyming motto *Ostendunt Signum, Rex Lupa Lignum*, with the name of Walter, or *Galteri*, placed between the rhyme. Its subject is taken from an incredible legendary tale respecting St. Edmund, which those who delight in such relations may read in Matthew of Westminster.*

I have not thought it necessary to pursue the inquiry into this mode of seal-engraving, through the stages of its progressive improvement. It continued, and still continues, to be performed with the same implements used in the same manner; or

* P. 165, edit. Francof. 1601.

at least with no other variations than have been produced by the gradual improvement of society operating on the peculiarities of individual talent; and the detail of its productions would probably afford little interest, but as they are connected with feudal and religious contests, and no further elucidation of *our subject*.

You will do engraving the justice to bear in remembrance, that I am here but urging my way through the chaos of the art, in order to arrive at the purer elements that lie beyond, and must be content to "tread the crude consistence, half flying, half on foot;" marking the spots of lucid capability, and labouring to render the least untractable of its materials, subservient to the means of passing it.

Soon after the conquest, says Mr. Strutt, (though, from other information, I think it must have been at the least two hundred and fifty years from that memorable æra) a new species of engraving, entirely different from the mingled work of the engraver,

1800

goldsmith, and chaser, which had preceded it, was introduced into, or invented in, England, of which there is scarcely an old country church of any consequence but affords some curious specimens, and England more than any other nation in Europe.

The brass plates on our old sepulchral monuments are executed entirely with the graver, the shadows, where shadowing is attempted, being expressed by lines or strokes, strengthened in proportion to the required depth of shade, and occasionally crossed with other lines, a second, and in some instances a third time, precisely in the same manner as a copper-plate is engraved that is intended for printing. These engraved effigies are commonly found on those horizontal tombstones which form part of the pavement within the churches; and the feet of the congregation, which kept the lights bright by friction, filled the incisions with dust, and thus darkened the shades: very neat or exquisite workmanship is not therefore expected; yet some of them bear no small evidence of the

abilities of the monks, or other workmen by whom they were performed.

The art of engraving has served alike to enlighten the darkest and embellish the most enlightened periods of history. In the early Gothic, Gallic, and Saxon signets, it flung a faint ray of intelligence athwart the gloom of unlettered centuries. From the art of necessity has proceeded the *fine* art. The rough arm of labour has gradually submitted to the guidance of the delicate finger of taste. The beautiful engraving; the exquisite graces; the mental and manual ability, which we admire in the Battle of La Hogue, and the Diploma of the Royal Academy, are displayed principally with the same simple instrument, which cut the seals and sepulchral inscriptions of which we have been discoursing.

In this view of our subject it may therefore be said, that the kind of engraving that is more especially the object of these Lectures, has arisen from the tombs

of our ancestors.—But as we now approach the æra which must be regarded as the most memorable and interesting in the history of the art, I shall beg leave to pause, that we may enter upon the consideration of engraving as combined with the art of printing on paper, with refreshed attention, on a future evening.