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III. CONVERSAZIONE.—*April 26, 1853.*

At the Last Conversazione of the Season, which was held in the Society's Rooms, the chief objects of interest exhibited consisted of a collection of Rubbings of Incised Monumental Slabs and Sepulchral Brasses; and also the original Sepulchral Brass of the Regent Murray, removed from St Giles's Church, Edinburgh, in 1829: contributed by the Hon. JOHN STUART. The Rubbings included—

Oxfordshire and other Brasses: by GEORGE SETON, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Brasses from Norfolk, Hertfordshire, &c.: by JOHN FINCH SMILES, M.D.

English and Foreign Brasses, with a selection of modern examples : by JOHN WYKEHAM ARCHER, Esq.

Scottish Incised Slabs, including those of Holyrood Abbey, St Andrews, &c. : by GEO. SETON, Esq., ANDREW KERR, Esq., Dr D. WILSON, and others.

Rubbings of the Scottish Brasses from St Giles's, Edinburgh ; Cathedral, Glasgow ; and Drum's Aisle, St Nicholas's Church, Aberdeen ; and of the Sepulchral Brass in the Savoy, Westminster, of GAWIN DOUGLAS, Bishop of Dunkeld, Author of the *Palace of Honour*, &c.

Collection of Drawings of Scottish Sculptured Standing Stones, Crosses, &c. : by JAMES DRUMMOND, Esq., F.S.A. Scot., R.S.A.

The Chair was taken by GEORGE HARVEY, Esq., R.S.A.

Dr D. WILSON gave a brief lecture "On some suggestive examples of Abortive Discovery in Ancient Art;" and in introducing the subject, he observed that, in fulfilling the duty which the Council had devolved on him, of illustrating the interesting examples of ancient art exhibited in the Society's rooms, by a few observations, it had appeared to him that the most striking aspect in which they could be viewed was as imperfectly-developed examples of the chalcographic art. The origin of this class of sepulchral monuments was undoubtedly traceable to the desire of producing a more enduring memorial than the incised slab,—both being invariably placed, prior to the seventeenth century, on the ground, and not, as now employed, as mural monuments.

Among the earliest recorded English brasses were mentioned those of Jocelyn, Bishop of Wells, A.D. 1242, and Richard de Berkyng, Abbot of Westminster, A.D. 1246. These were not to be considered as furnishing anything like a precise date of the origin of this beautiful and enduring art. Examples of the thirteenth century were, however, extremely rare, nor was it till the latter part of the fourteenth century that they became common. From this period, however, till the middle of the seventeenth century, they were abundant, and it is scarcely possible to over-estimate their value to the historian or to the artist. They constitute, indeed, as a class, the most remarkable and trustworthy memorials of the middle ages that can be studied ; supplying evidences of great artistic skill, and of the state of the mechanical and ornamental arts, each marked with the precise date of its execution.

Dr Wilson then referred to the brasses exhibited, as shewing the character-

istics which distinguish those of Flemish and of English workmanship,—the former engraved on one large plate of metal, and filled up with rich tabernacle work, diapering, &c., while in the latter the figures, canopies, labels, &c., are cut out in metal, and let into the stone matrix. Of the former, the beautiful and unusually large brass of the Abbot de le Mare, from St Alban's Abbey Church, formed a remarkably fine example of the memorial of an ecclesiastic; while that of Roger de Thornton and Agness, his wife, from All Saints' Church, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, furnished a no less admirable specimen of a layman's monumental brass. The native style of brasses was illustrated by numerous examples, the finest of which, especially in execution as rubbings, were those contributed by Mr George Seton, from Oxfordshire.

It was not, however, as sepulchral monuments, but as works of art, and examples of ancient engraved plates, that attention was now invited to these mediæval relics. Though executed on so large a scale, they were literary engravings, according to the modern idea of the term; and so much was this practically felt to be the case, that the earliest impressions of them were taken by Mr Craven Ord, and other enthusiastic antiquaries of last century, by printing them as nearly as was possible by the ordinary copperplate-printer's process. An amusing account has been preserved to us of the outset of Sir John Cullum, Craven Ord, and their friends, like another "Pilgrimage to Canterbury," accoutred with ink-pots, flannels, brushes, &c., to take these "blackings" as they styled them; and by means of these the sole fac-similes of several fine English brasses are preserved, of which the originals have since been mutilated or destroyed. After referring to the interesting and now invaluable copies of French brasses taken in the beginning of the eighteenth century, shortly before the destruction of the originals in the furor of the first French Revolution, and subsequently bequeathed by Gough to the Bodleian Library, Dr Wilson went on to observe, that it must be considered as remarkable that engraved plates, thus capable of transferring impressions to paper, and in many instances displaying great skill in the use of the graver, should have been frequently executed, and constantly before the eyes of the monkish draftsmen and illuminators of mediæval manuscripts for considerably more than two centuries, and yet that the use of such plates for the purpose of multiplying impressions should have at length owed its introduction to an entirely different class of artists, the goldsmiths and niello-workers of Italy.

But sepulchral brasses, he remarked, were by no means to be regarded as the earliest examples of engraving. That art had been extensively practised from the most remote antiquity. Many beautiful specimens of Egyptian engraving on metal were preserved in the British Museum and other public collections; and from them it may be assumed that those venerable artists acquired the skill

which secured for them the enviable fame of having their names recorded in the earliest chapters of Hebrew history—the oldest of all gravers in metal, whose names have been preserved. It is said, in the Book of Exodus, of Bezaleel, who appears to have been both a goldsmith and engraver, “that he was filled with wisdom of heart to work all manner of work with the graver, as well as to devise cunning works; and it was put into his heart that both he and Aholiab might teach them that were filled with wisdom to work all manner of work of the engraver.” In like manner, Etruscan, Greek, and Roman art, all supplied evidence of the great skill and beauty with which the ancient engraver was accustomed to execute designs of an elaborate and delicate character. Another class of early examples of engraved plates were the title-deeds and royal grants of India, which have for ages been—not engrossed on parchment—but graven on more enduring brass. In illustration of this, the lecturer exhibited (from the Museum of the Society) a beautifully-engraved Ceylonese title-deed on copper, richly mounted with silver, and with the royal signature inlaid in silver. The plate was engraved on both sides, and, as he observed, if freed from its silver mountings, could now be printed from as readily as any modern copper-plate.

These, Dr Wilson observed, were not to be regarded as merely presenting some analogies to modern engraving. Such of them as were executed on flat surfaces differed in no degree; and they were only now deterred from multiplying impressions of them, from the great value so justly attaching to such rare examples of early art, and the consequent apprehension of injuring their delicate surfaces. These, therefore, were examples of what he had characterized as “abortive discovery in ancient art.” Plates were actually engraved for upwards of three thousand years before accident at length suggested the extremely simple process of filling their incised lines with ink, and taking off the impression on paper. Yet soon after type-printing had been discovered, and applied to the multiplication of books, an edition of Ptolemy’s Geography, printed at Rome in 1478, was accompanied with engraved maps.

Dr Wilson then referred to seal and gem engraving, and the sinking of dies for coins, as supplying additional evidences of ancient skill in the art of the engraver; and also alluded to Scottish personal ornaments, such as the celebrated Hunterston brooch, as proving that the art was not unknown in our own country in early times. He then referred to the origin of wood-engraving, its practice by the Chinese from a very remote period, and its use by them for multiplying impressions analogous to the block-book printing, from whence at length the grand discovery of the typographic art was evolved in Europe in the fifteenth century. After exhibiting specimens of Chinese printing blocks and printed sheets, fac-similes were shewn of the famous wood-block engraving of St Chris-

topher, dated 1423, and other early examples of wood engraving; and he called attention to the very close resemblance in style between some of these and the sepulchral brasses of the same age. Referring to the inclination of Ottley, and other later writers, to trace the origin of wood-engraving, and thence of printing, directly through the Venetians to the Chinese, he availed himself of the occasion to combat what he conceived to be an unfounded and indeed most pernicious fallacy in relation to all archaeological investigation. The occurrence of analogous productions of human art, or some correspondence in architectural details, among the works of man in widely separated quarters of the globe, or in the remains of nations belonging to ages still more completely severed by time, has been frequently implicitly accepted in evidence of a community in origin, or as proof of some former intercourse of races. This fallacy is especially favoured by American archæologists in our own day; ambitious of carrying back the history of the New World far up the stream of time, and of allying themselves by such relationship with some great historic ancestry of the Old World. Hence the hieroglyphics of Mexico and Yucatan have been assumed as furnishing undoubted proofs of the ancient occupation of the New World by a human population familiar with the learning of, if not related by blood to, the natives of the Nile Valley; although in reality there is no more relation between the hieroglyphics of Mexico and Memphis, than between the Roman alphabet of England and the word-writing of the Chinese. Referring to the numerous examples of primitive weapons and implements of the same type in the Society's cabinets, from the great valley of the Mississippi, the banks of the Hudson, and Central America, and others from Scandinavia, Ireland, and Scotland, he observed that we must be content to refer these analogies discoverable in the productions of primitive art, to the instinctive operations of human ingenuity, while in the development of like similarities in relation to the higher arts and purposes of life, we frequently see only the operation of a great psychological law, which might be thus stated:—place men, however widely apart by time and space, under precisely similar circumstances, and they will, in all probability, supply their wants, and gratify their faculties by similar means.

Dr Wilson then exhibited from the Society's collection several bronze Roman stamps, which he shewed differed essentially from the intaglio stamps evidently designed for making impressions on wax or other yielding substance. Their inscriptions were not only in relief, but the projecting surface was alone finished smoothly; and it was impossible in examining them to avoid the conclusion that they were designed for multiplying impressions with a coloured pigment, like modern printers' types; and to prove the practicability of the substitution of such stamps for types, he proposed to use one of them—found a few years ago in Mid-

Lothian—and to print from it in the Society's next fasciculus of proceedings; so that they would actually print from types (as is hereby done) executed probably in the second century of the Christian era, some thirteen hundred years before the age of Guttenberg and Fust. Even this, however, did not disclose to us all the evidences of the near approach which the ancients made to the discovery of printing, as well as of engraving. The grand feature of modern typographical discovery was the invention of moveable types. But this also had been already known to the Romans, as was proved from the potters' stamps on specimens of Samian and other ware, various examples of which he produced. In some of these the displaced and accidentally reversed letters prove beyond all doubt that the stamp had been made up of distinct letters or types, which, like the contemporaneous engravings, only required the happy thought to have arranged and employed them for the printing-press; and Ptolemy's Geography might have been corrected for the Roman press under his own eye, instead of initiating its virgin labours in the fifteenth century. These, then, were also remarkable examples of abortive discovery supplied by ancient art.



Returning to the subject to which attention was more immediately called by the highly interesting collection of illustrations of mediæval sepulchral brasses, Dr Wilson observed that such might justly be regarded as forming a series of valuable historical documents, of undoubted authenticity, carrying back history for nearly three centuries prior to the discovery of printing. After referring to a curious example of a late date, supplied by the engraving of the same lady, on two Norfolk brasses, along with her two different husbands, at an interval of twenty-six years, wherein we are able not only to trace the minute and striking variations of costume in England during the reigns of Edward VI. and Elizabeth, but also the change of creed, ideas, and social habits; he directed attention to the fine example of an original Scottish brass, obligingly contributed by the Hon. John Stuart for the occasion; and expressed his hope that this valuable historical memorial, the monument dedicated by a mourning nation to him on whom was conferred the enviable title of "The Good Regent," would ere long be restored to its original site in St Giles's Church, and thereby purge our city and its civic rulers from the disgrace of demolishing the public monument of one of Scotland's greatest statesmen, under the strange idea that its removal could add to the beauty or increase the interest of our metropolitan church.

The lecturer concluded by referring to other examples of Scottish brasses still remaining in Aberdeen and Glasgow, and to the evidence which their matrices supply of their former existence at Seton, Whitekirk, North Berwick, Dunblane, Kirkwall, &c. ; and also to the beautiful specimens of the revival of this ancient art, exhibited by Mr John Wykeham Archer, who has so successfully applied the improvements of modern chemical science in restoring this class of sepulchral monuments.

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May 9, 1853.

REV. WILLIAM STEVENSON, D.D., Vice-President,  
in the Chair.

The following Nobleman was elected a Fellow of the Society :—

The Right Hon. The LORD PANMURE.

The Donations laid on the Table included :—

Catalogue of a collection of Ancient and Mediæval Rings and Personal Ornaments : by the LORD LONDESBOROUGH, Hon. Mem. S.A. Scot.

Nest of Brass Weights, formerly used in the Old Cunzie House, Edinburgh : by JAMES CUNNINGHAM, Esq.

A small collection of Roman Glass, including various examples ; Lachrymatories, and other small vessels : by T. NISBET, Esq.

Part of Lower Jaw of an Ox (apparently the extinct *Bos longifrons*, Owen), found in a " Pict's House," on Wideford Hill, near Kirkwall, Orkney : by GEORGE PETRIE, Esq., Cor. Mem. S.A. Scot.

Bronze Celt, found in the parish of Kilmuir, Isle of Skye ; and a Stone Patera, found deeply imbedded in a Moss in the same parish : by the Rev. ALEX. MACGREGOR, Minister of the Gaelic Church, Edinburgh.

Ancient Octagonal Silver Brooch, of curious workmanship, of the fourteenth century.

Antique Silver Thumb Ring, made apparently from a Greek coin of Thurium in Lucania: by W. W. HAY NEWTON, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.