II.

NOTICE OF THE ANCIENT DIE OF A SCOTTISH COIN FOUND NEAR PITTENCRIEFF, RECENTLY PRESENTED TO THE MUSEUM. By W. H. SCOTT, M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

The ancient Scottish die, or "coining iron" now laid before the Society, and figured here full size (fig. 2), was, as will be remembered, presented at a recent meeting by Mr Hunt of Pittencrieff, with the information that it had been found in the ruins called King Malcolm's Castle, in the Pittencrieff grounds, Dunfermline. Pieces of burnt wood were found along with it. As this is, I believe, with the exception of the defaced dies of Queen Anne from the Edinburgh Mint preserved in our Museum, the only relic of the ancient Scottish Mint, it may deserve a little examination.

Fig. 1.

The type (fig. 1), printed from a cast of the die itself, is that of a great number of coins of Alexander III., namely, a long cross, extending to the edge of the coin. In each of the quarters, a mullet, or open star, of six points. This type commenced with Alexander III., so that the die cannot be earlier than his reign; from a careful comparison of his coins and others with an impression from the die, I am confirmed in the idea which occurred to me on first seeing it, that it actually belonged to his reign. From the circumstance that the legend contains only, as usual at and after his period, the words REX SCOTORVM, I have no means of proving this, but it will be considered probable by those who make the comparison. As nothing, so far as I am aware, is known as to the practices of our Scottish Mint, I may illustrate the subject by reference to what is known of the English Mint, which will supply with certainty some information. In the plate laid before the Society, contained in the seventh volume of the *Numismatic Chronicle,* may be seen figures of two dies, much resembling ours in form, the one, the standard, or lower die, which contains the head of the prince, being in shape like ours, but furnished with a point or tang, by which it was fixed in a block of wood, or anvil; the other, the trussell, or upper die, to which ours corresponds, having no such appen-

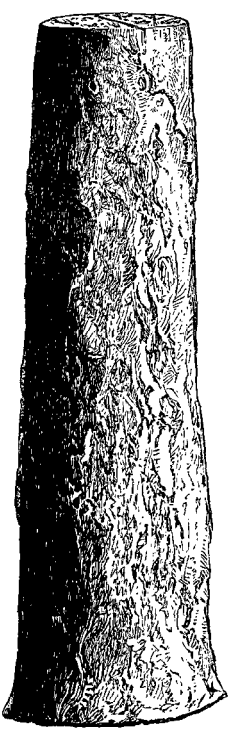

Fig. 2.

dage, but being intended to receive the blows of the hammer. The silver or other metal was cast into small bars, and hammered to the proper thickness, then cut probably into square pieces, which were roughly cut round, then placed one at a time on the lower die, the upper die placed upon them, and the whole repeatedly struck by a mallet, till the proper type was produced.

The accompanying figure (Fig. 3), for a stereotype cast of which the Society

COINER AT WORK.—From the Capital of a Pillar at St. Georges de Bocherville, Normandy.

Fig. 3.

is indebted to the kindness of Robert Chambers, Esq., is derived from the Pictorial History of England, i., 594, where it is stated to be taken from the capital of a pillar at St George's, Bocherville, Normandy. It represents a moneyer in the act of working, as above described. The piece of metal, or *flan*, is placed on the lower die, the workman holds in one hand the upper die which he is about to apply to it, and in the other the mallet. We learn indeed more from the documents relating to the French Mint than we do from the English, and there is no doubt that the processes were the same. We thus learn from a French document, that after the blanks were roughly rounded, they were piled together, taken in pincers, and being thus held together as if they formed a solid cylinder, were hammered round on an anvil, after which each piece was separately beaten flat again. This curious document seems to have escaped the notice of British antiquaries generally, as the appearance of the coins of William

the Conqueror and our William the Lion, which has been particularly noticed, and which has led some antiquaries to remark that they seem to have been struck in a collar, is thus perfectly explained. The paper I refer to is a copy of the regulations agreed upon by the incorporated moneyers of Paris, in the year 1354, and is given at length by M. Cartier, in the *Revue Numismatique* for 1846, p. 369 seq. I quote the passages referred to:—

> "Item. Que nul ouvrier ne face ses deniers en sa fournaise s'il ne les rechausse deulx fois avant qu'il les eslaise, sur peine de cinq sols tournois."

M. Cartier, in his note, explains the technical phrase *rechausser*, "to strike the blanks, yet unstamped, on an anvil, so as to make them round, holding a certain quantity, placed in a pile, in pincers." The second word, *eslaiser*, he explains,—"to flatten the blanks after having rounded them as above, by striking them on the surface; this was the last operation before minting them."

It will now be clearly understood how our die was used, I think, from the comparison of these various authorities. It is difficult to understand how a stray die should come to be dug up at Dunfermline, where I am not aware of the existence of a mint. It is possible, however, that some coins of the third coinage of Alexander III. (Lindsay, p. 77, Nos. 144, 145, 146) *may* belong to Dunfermline; though from the legend being only DVN, and some coins occurring (p. 77, No. 143; p. 85, Nos. 275, 276) with the unequivocal name of Dumbarton, written on the former DNBARE, on the latter DVNBERTAN, it must remain doubtful. Dundee indeed has as good a claim as either Dumbarton or Dunfermline to the coins with DVN. I do not think that the discovery of a stray die is sufficient to authorize us in supposing the existence of a Mint at Dunfermline, more especially as some blunders in the legend might serve to throw doubts, not indeed on its antiquity, but on its authenticity as a relic of the royal mint. A close examination will show that the X in REX is very badly formed, and resembles an H, that the S in SCOTORVM is not recognisable, and that the workman has cut A for O in the same word.

It is possible, of course, that these blunders might have caused its rejection by the Superintendent of the Mint, and that it might have been in consequence thrown aside, and lost. I greatly question, however, that it would have been merely thrown aside; I believe that any rejected die would have been at once defaced or destroyed, to prevent its coming into improper hands. My conclusion from these various reasons is, that I incline to think it a forgery of the period, employed by some counterfeiter in Dunfermline probably. I cannot of course say this positively, but I have given my reasons for thinking so, and leave my hearers to decide for themselves. I may mention that no coin of

Alexander III., with these peculiarities in the legend, has yet, so far as I know, been discovered, although the die seems to have been used. Whether the die be really one belonging to the authorized Mint, or the result of some forger's ingenuity, it is equally curious, and the thanks of the Society and of all antiquaries, are justly due to the gentleman who has preserved from destruction, and placed in the Scottish Museum, a relic of such interest.