III.

NOTE OF THE ORIGINAL MATRIX OF THE SEAL OF THE BURGH OF ABERDEEN A.D. 1430. By COSMO INNES, Esq., V.P.S.A. Scot.

I was very glad to observe Mr Duncan M'Laren the other day calling the attention of the Convention of Burghs to the materials which exist in the records of many—I may say of most—of our Scottish burghs, for illustrating the history and manners of the ancient burghers—a very interesting and once most important class of society.

One small part of any inquiry on that subject must turn upon old burgh seals, often very ancient, and sometimes connecting the civil and political history of the burgh with the earlier church legend which attached to the place.

Thus, the ancient seal of the town or city of Glasgow—long before it became a burgh, as old, indeed, as the thirteenth century—has a head of a mitred saint, St Kentigern, between a bird and tree on one hand, and a fish bearing a ring in its mouth, and a hand-bell, on the other; the three symbols pointing to three popular miracles of that saint.

The making of the present Glasgow burgh seal fell in a bad time for art, and it must shock Mr Seton. It preserves, however, the connection I pointed at. The tree on which the Saint's bird sat, now symbolises the City, the bell hangs ornamentally on a branch, and the fish with the ring of the Saint's miracle, becomes a jolly fat Clyde salmon. The motto, "Let Glasgow flourish," is not in the best taste of such little literature, and the original conclusion—"by the preaching of the word"—is only valuable as marking the period when such an inscription could have been thought of for such a purpose.

A similar connection is found between the seals of the Abbey of Holyrood and of its burgh of Canongate. There is reason to believe that the myth of King David I. hunting and encountering a stag with a cross between its horns, is not of very early origin, though certainly earlier than Boece, that great fabler, who does *not* tell it. The figure of the stag with the cross is found, however, on the seal of Abbot Patrick in 1425, and is conspicuous on all the subsequent seals of the Abbots; and

the legend had become popular, for when the Abbot's burgh of Canongate became important enough to require a seal for authenticating its deeds, it took for device or bearing, the stag, with the cross between its horns, which you still see on the gable of the Canongate Church, serving to commemorate its old dependence upon King David's Abbey of Holyrood.

Other instances might be collected, and I make little doubt that the seal of Edinburgh—the triple-towered castle—might be connected with an older ecclesiastical symbolism; but that is not to be done in a parenthesis, and I come now to the present instance.

The earliest common seal known of the burgh of Aberdeen is that appended to the deed for the ransom of King David II. in 1357. It bears on one side the figure of St Nicholas, the patron saint, and on the other a representation of a common shape of a fertir or shrine of the saint, with three domes or pinnacles, so commonly found as the ornaments of such repositories of relics in the Middle Ages. The inscriptions round that seal and counter-seal, are:—

Singnum. Beati. Nicolai. Aberdonensis.
Sigillum de communi Aberdonensi.

The next seal used by the burgh of Aberdeen is slightly different, but still preserves symbols of its dependence upon its patron, St Nicholas. The name of the Saint is no longer given on the inscription, but he is represented in person readily recognised in performing one of his most celebrated miracles, restoring to life the three clerks who had been killed and pickled by a cannibal innkeeper of Myra, who proposed to sell their flesh as pork. On the reverse, the fertir or shrine, with its triple dome, has undergone a moderate change into a castle with triple towers, sufficiently warlike to give a foundation to the fable of Boece, who pretends that these were arms granted to Aberdeen to commemorate the bravery of the burghers in storming the castle with its English garrison. The herald sees with more interest in this seal, an early instance of the use of our royal double tressure fleurie-counterfleurie, and of supporters to the shield, two lions or leopards. It gives, too, the earliest occurrence of the pretty motto of the city, "Bon Accord." On both seal and counter-seal is the inscription:—

Sigillum commune de Aberden.

When I had occasion twenty years ago to make some remarks on this seal, I described it as a brass matrix-seal and counter-seal in the possession of Mr Walter Duthie, and I tried to fix its date, assigning it, from reasonable conjectures, to the early part of the fifteenth century.

Several years later there was found at Aberdeen, another matrix of the same seal, and its possessor, Mr William Smith, 106 Union Street, Aberdeen, with the greatest politeness, communicated it to me; as I am now about to restore it, I have thought it proper, with the approbation of your Council, to secure for our Museum a fac-simile of it, done by the galvanic process, by our ingenious artist, Mr Henry Laing.

You observe that, while this seal is in all other respects identical with the stamps of Mr Duthie, it has one interesting addition in an inscription on the back of each part, fixing the date and the name of the Provost or alderman who ordered it to be made in this manner:—

The yer of gras m.cccc.xxx, jon the vaus was alderman and thes sel mad.