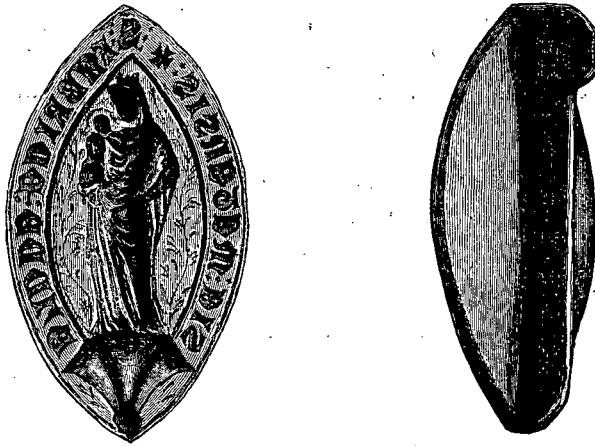


I.

NOTICE OF THE BRASS MATRIX OF THE FABRIC SEAL OF THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST STEPHEN AT METZ, NOW PRESENTED
TO THE MUSEUM. BY WILLIAM FORBES, Esq., FOREIGN SECRETARY.

This matrix was found in the repositories of my brother, the late Bishop of Brechin. None of his friends know either how or when it came into his possession. It is probable that he may have acquired it on one of his occasional visits to Germany. The seal, which is here engraved of the full size, bears an image of the Virgin Mary and the Infant Christ. The Virgin has a flower in her right hand, and around the margin of the seal is the inscription, "S. Fabrice Ecclesie Metensis."



Brass Matrix of the Seal of the Fabric of the Cathedral Church of Metz, obverse and reverse (actual size).

The Cathedral of St Etienne is a noble Gothic edifice, which, although it presents anomalies such as the excessive height of the clerestory, which

Fergusson, our great authority, criticises, still justifies him in saying "that the result, however contrary to the rules of art, is most fascinating." It is cruciform, 370 feet long, 141 high. The nave was completed in 1332. It must have been a beautiful edifice at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Many of the monuments, including tombs and painted glass windows, were destroyed in the great Revolution, but one tablet survives—a mural inscription to Pierre Perrat, the architect of the church, who died in 1400. I was at first inclined to think that the seal now exhibited was used by him; I have ascertained, as I shall presently show, that it must have been used at even an earlier date.

Not having directed my own studies to seals, I naturally brought myself into communication with experts, and I will now relate what they say on the subject. Our great Scottish authority, Mr Henry Laing, author of the well-known "Catalogue of Scottish Seals" (Bannatyne Club, 4to, 1850, and supplementary volume), regrets that he is unable to give any definite information regarding this seal. He adds—"I certainly consider it a foreign seal, and from the style of art think it must be assigned to about the fourteenth century, but the inscription is the greatest difficulty. I have never met any similar, and can offer no explanation."

Mr Cochran-Patrick, while saying that he can only offer a conjecture on the question, adds: "Fabrica and fabricatores will be sufficiently explained in Du Cange (ed. 1733, vol. iii. p. 257-9 [fig. 4]), and the seal certainly belongs to Metz, which is often called 'Metis' in early chronicles." He concludes, "I have never seen a seal with 'Fabrica' on it before, and should consider its age as fourteenth or early part of fifteenth century, but this is merely based on the lettering. It may be earlier. In conclusion, I *conjecture* it to have been the official seal of the body connected with the care of the Cathedral of Metz."

Mr Augustus W. Franks, of the British Museum, writes—"The seal, of which you have sent me an impression, is clearly that of the 'works,' (fabrica), of the Cathedral of Metz. It appears to me that the Blessed Virgin holds in her hand a flower, the leaves of which are very plain, though the flower itself is oddly drawn. I should think it must be late fourteenth century work, and it is a nice specimen of its kind."

I next applied to Mr William Stubbs, the professor of history in

Oxford, who is looked upon as a great authority on all matters bearing on his peculiar studies. He writes as follows:—"I have never seen a seal of the kind described, and there is no such seal mentioned in the list of seals given in Chassant's 'Palæography,' or in my copy of Du Cange. But I think it can be easily accounted for as being the seal which that portion of the Metz chapter which managed the fabric accounts would use for the sealing of all business documents, especially contracts, and receipts for money collected by brief or indulgences. We might describe them as the fabric committee of the chapter, or the 'procuratores,' as they are sometimes called in the indulgences granted by the bishops for the purpose of collecting money. The fabric was, I think, in ordinary times under the charge of the 'magister officiorum,' but when any great repairs were wanted it was committed to a special body. As the seal 'ad causas' was a particular seal for legal business, the seal 'fabricæ' would be the official seal of this committee. Sometimes, as at Canterbury in 1188, a fraternity was instituted to pray and raise contributions, but I think if this seal had belonged to such a body the inscription would have had some dedicating words upon it. Fabric rolls form a large part of the muniments of old churches, like York, Windsor, and the like, and it is not impossible that there may be fabric seals in England, but I have never heard of any. (1) Copies of indulgences, and (2) receipts, and (3) contracts, would require a special sealing, and may have had a special seal."

The Dean of York also informs me that there is nothing in the registers of the minster there bearing on this type of seal.

Having exhausted all the sources of information open to me in this country, I was enabled through a friend to communicate with the Abbé Kraus, the professor of *Christliche Kunst Archéologie* in the University of Strasburg. He says: "The *Sig. Fab. Eccles. Metensis* is in the original at present preserved in the treasury of Metz Cathedral. I do not remember to have seen impressions of it on any documents, as the old cathedral archives unfortunately exist no longer. In the archives of the *Frauenwerks* at Strasburg there are numerous diplomas with the *Sigillum Fabricæ Ecclesiæ Argentinensis* (the Latin name for Strasburg). One such seal is of the beginning of the thirteenth, another of the fourteenth century. They are both reproduced in my '*Kunst-Altherthumer in Elsass-*

Lettingen,' 1 vol., Strasburger, Münster, Biologen." It is unfortunate that the British Museum does not possess this book.¹

It would have been an unpardonable omission had I failed to communicate with the ecclesiastical authorities in Metz. I accordingly addressed a letter to the bishop, and received a courteous reply from his chancery secretary, who tells me that his lordship had referred my letter to a learned ecclesiastic, who informed him at a personal interview that the seal in my possession is of the fourteenth century; that it was not the seal of Pierre Perrat, but belonged to the fabric of the cathedral church; and that the original is now preserved, with seven other seals, in the museum of the town. He annexes the following description of these different seals:—

1. *S. Fabrice Ecclesie Metensis.* Sceau de la Fabrique de la Cathédrale de Metz. XIV^e Siècle.

2. *S. Procur Fabrice Eccle . . . ie SCI STE.* Sceau du Procureur de la Fabrique. XIV^e S.

3. *Sigillum Sancti Pauli Metensis Ecclesie. Magnus Scs Paulus.* Sceau du Chapitre de la Cath. de Metz. XIII^e S.

4. *Sancti Pauli Secretum.* Sceau secret du Chapitre, etc.

5. *S. Majoris Eccle Meten Ad Causas Magnus Paulus.* Autre Sceau du Chapitre. XIII^e S.

6. *Sigillum Nobilis Capituli Metensis.* Sceau du Chapitre noble, etc. 18^e Siècle. Écu du Chapitre.

¹ Since this paper was written the Abbé Kraus paid a flying visit to Edinburgh, and visited the Museum, in company with Dr Arthur Mitchell, the secretary. He examined the seal in question, and expressed himself in terms of high admiration of our Museum.