SOME NATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS NUMISMATICALLY EXEMPLIFIED.

By F. Stroud, of Lincoln's Inn, Recorder of Tewkesbury.

MONEY "is as it were the Sanguification of the Commonwealth," so said Hobbes in his "Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civill." Money is the test of character, as well nationally as individually. It reveals the minor workings of the individual mind and in its larger aspect, it exemplifies the characteristics of the past. In this view the science of numismatics is the science of life. It recalls and illustrates history. This has been quite recently shown to the members of this Society—firstly, by the President's paper on "Treasure Trove" read at our Anniversary Meeting of 1904\(^1\); secondly, by that of Dr. Nelson on "Obsidional Money of the Great Rebellion, 1642–9,"\(^2\) read on January 18th, 1905. Those who had the advantage of hearing those papers will recall them with much pleasure. Each, in its own graphic line, brought before us phases in our English history of dramatic and abiding interest, whilst, by the way, the trenchant criticisms by our President on certain dealings of the British Museum were much enjoyed and remain a possession.

One point of national character which is numismatically illustrated I venture to emphasize, I mean the Idiotcy of England. No doubt that word "Idiotcy" sounds harshly, and were I to attempt to apply it to any one in particular, it could hardly be done in a perfectly agreeable manner. But the connotation of the word, like the value of forgotten coins, has got blurred over. We are always losing good and useful words, as some of us have lost the knowledge of (and perhaps never knew) the value of many a coin which was once current in the realm.

\(^1\) British Numismatic Journal, I, 333.
\(^2\) Printed in this Journal.
Thus "genteel" is quite out of date, and yet what other one word can be used for the idea expressed by the French adjective gentil? So "culprit" is generally used as indicating a criminal person, whereas its real meaning is, a person on his or her trial for an alleged offence. So of "Idiot" I find this written by Dr. Smyth Palmer in his *Folk and their Word-Lore* (p. 55); "Neddy, an ass or a simpleton, commonly used in dialect English, has no connection with Edward (familiarly Ned and Neddy), but stands for an Eddy, an Idiot, which is the Old English eddi, eadi, eadig, innocent, happy, blessed." But I am rather using the word in the sense of a man with one prevailing idea which dominates him, and am hoping that some of the Greek scholars amongst our members will be able to supply an etymology which will justify the meaning now sought to be attributed to the word for the purpose of this address, a meaning sometimes imperfectly suggested in the doggerel:

One thing at a time, and that done well,
Is a very good thing as I can tell.

A wholesome doctrine that, and one which is characteristic of our race, but which we not infrequently push to extremes.

Probably one of the prevailing ideas of the British mind is a love of utility at the sacrifice, if need be and often without feeling any need, of beauty. Thus I think it would take a bold man to say that at any period of our history the current coinage was ever distinguished by its art. When one looks on this specimen of a Greek stater and

![Philip of Macedon, Prototype.](image1)

![British Version of Same Type.](image2)

compares it with a British stater, one is struck with the total lack of anything resembling artistic treatment in the latter coin, whilst that of Philip of Macedon is a thing of beauty. Doubtless the British coin is an outcome of the very infancy of the English people; but still there
was the Greek coin to copy, yet the copy of our British ancestors was as remote from what it followed as well could be. And a similar comparison might be made if one compares the English coinage at any date with much of the money coined elsewhere. One piece of English money—the Gothic crown of Queen Victoria—perhaps claims a place among art treasures, but the issue of that coin speedily ceased on account of its delicacy.

That latter remark gives rise to the reflection that, all the way, right from pre-Cæsar times, the British people thought only of one thing in connection with money—i.e. its utility, and, to mention again the comparison between the staters, it may be permissible to say that the British stater was of more utility than the Greek, in that it would pass from hand to hand with but little, if any, damage, whilst the high relief of the Greek coin and its delicate workmanship would subject its beauty to ruin by a very little amount of friction.

But the engrossing nature of the one idea is probably best shown when we consider the history of tokens. These private moneys revive memories of the seventeenth century, and especially of Cromwell’s time. But the numberless issues at the end of the eighteenth, and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, are those which prominently arrest attention, and elucidate the moral point now being urged. In the early part of George the Third’s reign we blundered into the quarrel with, and ultimate loss of, our North American Colonies. The nation had scarcely recovered from that shock, when the French Revolution with its Reign of Terror, terrified the nations. Then came the Napoleonic Wars, with Britain as paymaster. The whole energies of the Government were concentrated on the task of curbing the ambitions of the most successful, most ruthless and most unscrupulous, soldier that the world has ever seen. The Government was smitten with “Idiotcy,” it could think of only the one thing, with the result that the coinage was neglected, and the people were not supplied with the regular “circulating medium”; there was but very little proper money with which to carry on every-day transactions. But we, as per usual, “muddled through.” Tokens, metallic promissory notes, did the work which regal money should have done.
The Bank of England—Cobbett's "Old Lady of Threadneedle Street"—took a prominent part. The Bank had a regular issue of Tokens, i.e., a Bank dollar of 5s., a three-shilling token, and one for eighteen-pence. But long before these, tokens in silver were issued in many localities by private firms, whilst tokens in copper so much abounded that scarcely any leading tradesman was without his token. They were a favourite means of advertisement. They were also used as part of a propaganda, e.g., the John Howard tokens as promoting the movement for the abolition of imprisonment for debt. National legends were kept in memory by them; as for instance the Coventry tokens which presented the Lady Godiva in the scant garment of her beautiful hair, encircled with an inscription that she so appeared "Pro bono publico."

Incidentally, brief reference may here be made to the Crown-struck dollars of Spain, taken as prize from Spanish galleons, and which with a tiny impress of an effigy of the British King, were made to pass as currency for five shillings.

To show the deplorable state into which the currency had got during the Napoleonic scare, I may perhaps be allowed to quote the following Tale of a Sixpence taken from Charles Dickens's Life of Joey Grimaldi (illustrated by George Cruikshank)—a book by Dickens which is not mentioned in the list of his works given in the Index to the Dictionary of National Biography,—

One day Grimaldi and his friend Robert Gomery ("friend Bob" of Sadler's Wells) had been hunting all day for the beautiful butterfly then called Dartford Blues, and thinking of nothing but flies, until at length, their thoughts naturally turning to something more substantial, they halted for refreshment.

"Bob," said Grimaldi, "I am very hungry."
"So am I," said Bob.
"There is a public-house," said Grimaldi.
"It is just the very thing," observed the other.
It was a very neat public-house, and would have answered the purpose admirably, but Grimaldi having no money, and very much doubting whether his friend had any either, did not respond to the sentiment quite so cordially as he might have done.
"We had better go in," said the friend; "it is getting late—you pay."
"No, no. You."

"I would in a minute," said his friend, "but I have not got any money."

Grimaldi thrust his hand into his right pocket with one of his queerest faces, then into his left, then into his coat pockets, then into his waistcoat, and finally took off his hat, and looked into that, but there was no money anywhere.

They still walked on towards the public-house, meditating with woeful countenances, when Grimaldi spying something at the foot of a tree, picked it up, and suddenly exclaimed, with a variety of winks and nods, "Here's a sixpence."

The hungry friend's eyes brightened, but they quickly resumed their gloomy expression as he rejoined, "It's a piece of tin!" Grimaldi winked again, rubbed the sixpence, or the piece of tin, very hard, and declared, putting it between his teeth by way of test, that it was as good a sixpence as he would wish to see.

"I don't think it," said the friend, shaking his head.

"I'll tell you what," said Grimaldi, "we'll go to the public-house, and ask the landlord whether it's a good one, or not. They always know."

To this the friend assented, and they hurried on, disputing all the way whether it was really a sixpence or not; a discovery which could not be made at that time (when the currency was defaced and worn nearly plain) with the ease with which it could be made at present.

The publican, a fat jolly fellow, was standing at his door talking to a friend, and the house looked so uncommonly comfortable, that "friend Bob" whispered as they approached, that perhaps it might be best to have some bread and cheese first, and ask about the sixpence afterwards.

Grimaldi nodded his entire assent, and they went in and ordered some bread and cheese and beer. Having taken the edge off their hunger, they tossed up a farthing, which Grimaldi happened to find in the corner of some theretofore undiscovered pocket, to determine who should present the "sixpence." The chance falling on himself, he walked up to the bar, and with a very lofty air, and laying the questionable metal down with a dignity quite his own, requested the landlord to take the bill out of that.

"Just right, Sir," said the landlord, looking at the strange face that his customer assumed, and not at the sixpence.

"It's right, Sir, is it?" asked Grimaldi, sternly.

"Quite," answered the landlord; "thank ye, gentlemen." And with this he slipped the—whatever it was—into his pocket.
Gomery looked at Grimaldi, and Grimaldi, with a look and air which baffle all description, walked out of the house, followed by his friend.

"I never knew anything so lucky," he said, as they walked home to supper—"it was quite a Providence—that sixpence."

"A piece of tin, you mean," said Gomery.

Which of the two it was is uncertain; but Grimaldi often patronised the same house afterwards, and, as he never heard anything more about the matter, he felt convinced that it was a real good sixpence.

Thus in Dickens's own inimitable way, we get a numismatic side-light upon the life of the people when the "Idiotcy" of the Government was so pronounced—their energies so pre-occupied with the task of overthrowing Napoleon—that they could not attend to the currency, and thus it came about that people could not tell whether they were handling sixpences or pieces of tin!

What a contrast did Napoleon himself present to all this! Nothing too small for that giant intellect; nothing too great. He indeed had the mens aequa in arduis. That colossal and minute brain was exemplified numismatically, for on his return from Elba, and when he was passionately gathering himself against all Europe in arms, and buckling on his armour for the crowning disaster of Waterloo, he attended to the currency and saw to it that his effigy should again be impressed on the money of France, as will be seen by the specimen of a Napoleon of the Hundred Days which I ventured to show to the Society.

The contrast between the idiosyncrasies of the two nations still remains to some extent. But now-a-days we see and know one another more, and have got to like one another better. Our mutual angularities are to a large extent superseded by friendly rivalry. Thanks to the royal tact and personal popularity, supported by rare diplomatic ability, of our Gracious King, Edward VII, the two nations have found that their interests, though not quite the same, are by no means hostile; that whilst the one may lend to the other the idea of solidity, the other repays the compliment by offering an infinite variety of resource; the Entente Cordiale flourishes, and will, it may be fondly hoped, bring Peace, Prosperity and Content.
THE SCEATTA AND STYCA COINAGE OF THE EARLY ARCHBISHOPS OF YORK.
VIII.—IX. CENTURIES.