ART AND THE COINS OF ENGLAND.

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From very early times coins have been favourite vehicles for artistic expression, and in them lies the advantage, rare in painting, sculpture, or even bronze statuary, of examples of art being handed down to us unmutilated and unaffected by the ravages of time. Much has been written upon, and more said about the subject of art as shown on the coins of the ancient Greeks and Romans; but little attention appears to have been given to this aspect of later numismatics, at any rate as applied to the coins of our own country.

So far as I am aware, the classification of the whole body of English coins, from the point of view of the art expressed on them, has not before been attempted, although isolated groups have from time to time been studied in this way. Probably the main reason for this is, that until comparatively recent times, during which mediæval art began to assert its claims and have its influence, all art, whether in architecture, sculpture, painting, or engraving, had followed classic models. It must also be remembered that it was not until the revival of letters and the arts in the fifteenth century, that art, equal to that of the old classic masters, commenced to reappear, whether on coins or in painting and sculpture. Its decline in the middle ages was accelerated, if not mainly caused, by the irruptions, in the fourth and fifth centuries, of the northern barbarians into the plains of Italy where the art of Western Europe flourished; and subsequently the fury of the Iconoclasts, or image-breakers, in the eighth and ninth centuries did for art in the Eastern Empire what it had already suffered in Western Europe. In a first essay, therefore, on the art of British numismatics, it would be idle to claim more than an attempt to approach the
subject; and although it will deal with the whole volume of the currency of this country, the details given in the various periods will probably be capable of considerable expansion. As far as possible, references to the historical side of the coinage will be avoided, although it will be necessary to stray in that direction when speaking of designs, more especially of those on the early coins.

The earliest numismatic monuments of Britain are those attributed to the ancient Britons before their subjugation by the Romans. See *British Numismatic Journal*, vol. i, Plate, p. 354. It would be interesting if it could be shown that these rude coins were fashioned after designs evolved by our British forefathers, but there is no doubt that they are indirect copies of the gold staters of Philip II., King of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. These Macedonian staters, or "Philips," as they were afterwards called, being celebrated for their full weight and purity, not only superseded all other Greek gold coins then in existence, but were also extensively copied by the barbaric nations. They were first imitated in Sicily, then in Italy and Gaul, and finally in Britain; in every stage becoming less like the original, so that, although the relation of the British gold coins to those of Macedon is apparent when the transitional types are also compared, it would otherwise be difficult to believe that the crude and barbarous productions of the Britons had anything in common with the beautiful coins of Macedon. See illustrations, *British Numismatic Journal*, vol. ii, p. 2. Even in the crude imitations of the Britons, however, there are traces of a fall and rise in art. They appear to have been executed with constantly diminishing skill, until the influence of the Romans improved their workmanship. They reached their highest state of perfection in the coins of Cunobeline, who reigned over Central and Eastern Britain from about A.D. 5 to A.D. 41. Shortly after his death the issue of British coins altogether ceased, owing to the substitution of Roman money as the circulating medium. The date at which a distinct metallic currency was introduced into Britain is variously estimated as from 200 B.C. to 150 B.C. Hence the first class of coins which circulated in this country lasted for a period of about two hundred years, and, as we
have seen, was originally based upon a Greek model, but subsequently influenced by the art of Rome.

It would be foreign to our subject to consider the Roman coinage which constituted the next class of metallic currency issued in this country, however interesting it might be to the student of Roman art. Magnus Maximus, who died in A.D. 388, was, perhaps, the last of the Roman Emperors to strike coins in Britain, but Roman money continued to circulate in this country, probably long after the final departure of the Romans, between A.D. 400 and A.D. 430. As may be imagined, the coinage of Britain immediately succeeding this period is involved in much obscurity, and it is difficult to say when Roman money was superseded by coins of native workmanship. The connecting link between the Roman money and Saxon coins struck by kings known to history is the class of money called sceattas. Plate I, Nos. 1–26. The origin and time of issue of these coins have not yet been definitely ascertained, although some of the later series have been identified with the princes and ecclesiastics who issued them, nor is it within the scope of this treatise to enquire; but their period of circulation would seem to have extended from about the commencement of the seventh until nearly the close of the eighth centuries. They exhibit more numerous designs than any subsequent group of coins, whether English or foreign, and they are divisible into two main classes: the first, comprising coins bearing designs which are imitations of Roman types, and the second comprising those the designs on which indicate purely native ideas. The latter, which are the more interesting to us, bear representations of fantastic animals, whorl-patterns and numerous ornaments, similar to those which adorn early Irish and Saxon manuscripts and, in later times, appear in our earliest architecture. The origin of some of these designs on the Saxon sceattas is obvious. In others it is fairly easy to suggest prototypes; but in many imagination is as yet at fault. Nevertheless, elucidation of the types of these interesting coins is not impossible, and careful comparison of a large series of them would probably tell the tale. It is suggested that many of the designs on them are more original than is generally supposed. Hitherto most of the types have
been attributed to Roman influence, but the explanation of many should be sought in the pagan-Christian overlap, which resulted in the assimilation of pagan symbols to those of the Christian faith. The strangled wolves, the writhing dragons and serpents of Scandinavian art, to some degree depicted on the sceattas, represent the portentous struggle which, according to Scandinavian mythology, waged between the powers of darkness and the northern gods and ended in the destruction of Valhalla. The chief interest in the series lies in its being the earliest monument extant of native Saxon work; and although it cannot be said to have much artistic merit from our point of view, yet it is undoubtedly useful in tracing the evolution of design.

The next class of metallic currency which circulated in this country consisted of the well-known series of Saxon silver pennies, which was introduced towards the close of the eighth century. In considering English coins from this time onwards, it will be noticed that the debased imitation of the decayed Roman style of art, so much in evidence upon the sceatta series, is changed to a class of design expressed in an entirely new feeling which, if not remarkable for its beauty, shows, at least, a great improvement in style. The same feeling was revived by the flamboyant style of the fourteenth century, which in its turn was succeeded, in the sixteenth century, by designs on the coins which, for the first time, disclosed some ambition to compete with the old masterpieces of Greece and Rome; but finally the utilitarian spirit of modern times has caused the coinage to degenerate into a state chiefly noticeable for the conservatism of its designs and for its mechanical execution. Viewing, therefore, the whole of the currency of this country in perspective, the conclusion is arrived at that it is susceptible of division into four periods of art. These four periods, so far as the coinage is concerned, may be classified as 1. Mediaeval. 2. Later mediaeval. 3. Renaissance. 4. Modern.

1. Mediaeval Art.

The first period of mediaeval art extends from the time of Offa, King of Mercia, 757 to 796, to that of Edward II., 1307 to 1327, and during the whole of this time the currency of the country, with the
In the Reign of Offa.

In the exception of a copper coinage of stycas during the first hundred years in Northumbria, consisted of silver pennies, with occasional halfpennies and farthings also in silver. It is a remarkable fact that the coins of Offa are more artistic than any issued subsequently in this period. (Plate I, Nos. 27—33.) The cause has been attributed to the influences of a visit which Offa is said to have made to Rome. Lingard, in his *History of England*, however, discredits this occurrence, and a critical investigation of the historical records on which the supposition was founded, supports the scepticism of the great historian. It is certain, however, that Offa was in frequent communication with the Continent: he was a contemporary of Charlemagne—and as such might well have been influenced by Continental art. An examination of the coins, however, furnishes internal evidence that their designs could not have been thus introduced, and it is more reasonable to assume that the superiority of Offa's pennies is due to causes purely native and, therefore, not subject to external influences. A comparison of Offa's coins with those minted on the Continent shows that the latter are not only inferior in art, but also that they could have afforded little, if any, inspiration to the engravers of the dies of the Saxon king. Hence we must look for another source whence the inspiration came, and this will be found in the Celtic and Saxon illuminated manuscripts of the time, which were also, in their own particular sphere, pre-eminent. An examination of an early Irish or Saxon illuminated manuscript will show the high artistic merit of its ornamental portions, and the exuberant fancy displayed in the figure subjects of the miniatures; the various features of the animate objects portrayed are often ingeniously converted into spiral curves which, if they render the designs grotesque as portraiture, make them beautiful as ornaments: a typical example may be quoted in *The Book of Kells*. The connection between the designs of the coins and the illuminated miniatures in the manuscripts is evidenced by the fact that many of the former are found in the latter. The reverse designs on Offa's coins chiefly comprise crosses, floral designs, interlaced patterns, and intertwined serpents; the latter being not only commonly met with in the Saxon
and Irish manuscripts, but peculiar to them. It is also interesting to notice that the same kind of ornamentation is common to the Celtic and pre-Norman stone crosses. The busts on Offa’s coins are usually well formed, being more life-like and less servile and conventional than on later Saxon coins. The hair is arranged in curls or plaits or is loose and flowing, whilst the drapery of the bust is natural and varied.

After the death of Offa there was a decline in art on the Saxon coins, and this must be attributed to the facts that Offa was far in advance of his age, and that he fostered the art of his kingdom as much as he promoted its internal prosperity and external expansion. The art on the coins of his successors is, indeed, of that crude style which is characteristic of all the later coins of the Saxon administration, usually consisting of a rude and conventional bust on the obverse, and on the reverse of a religious symbol, chiefly the cross. But although nothing so artistic as Offa’s designs was produced in this period, there were times of revival when, perhaps, some Sovereign or ecclesiastic had the inclination, and found the leisure, to devote his attention to such designs. That the improvements were neither great nor lasting is not surprising when we consider the circumstances of the time in which our Saxon forefathers lived, for, if not defending itself against foreign invaders, the nation was but too often harried by internal conflict, when but scanty attention could be given to the coins of the country or, indeed, to any other useful improvement.

Now and again, however, the question of the currency would arise and improvements in design result. For instance, among the many things which claimed the attention of Alfred the Great, who reigned from 871 to 901, not the least was the coinage, and in his reign, for the first time since that of Offa, some attempt at portraiture appears to have been made (Plate II, Nos. 34–35), which, however, was further developed under Edward the Elder (Plate II, No. 36), and Athelstan (Plate II, No. 37). The designs on the reverse of the coins of Edward, besides being numerous are also interesting, including, as they do, the well-known Hand of Providence, reproduced from the coins of the Byzantine princes, and representations of Saxon architecture. Athelstan paid considerable attention to the coinage, and introduced a
greater uniformity in the types. A penny of Athelstan, with the
design of a building, probably a church, is shown in Plate II, No. 38.
In the reign of Athelred II., the king for the first time appears
wearing a helmet within a radiated crown, and the design is sufficiently
well executed to give a very good impression of the mailed leather
hauberk of the period. (Plate II, No. 39.) What improvement may
have been effected in the coins of Athelred II. was probably due to
the efforts of Dunstan, the famous Abbot of Glastonbury, who, in his
later days, turned his attention to those arts which the political
intrigues of his earlier career had prevented him from following,
although inclined to do so by his natural taste. On the coins of Cnut
was introduced the high pointed helmet (Plate II, No. 40), which
figures so prominently in the later Bayeaux tapestry.

The coins of Edward the Confessor, A.D. 1041 to 1066, can
scarcely be called artistic, but several striking designs were adopted,
which point to the fact that considerable attention must have been paid
to the coinage of the country. A very noticeable design of this reign
is that called the sovereign type (Plate II, No. 41), which exhibits a
full-length figure of the king seated on a throne and holding a sceptre
and orb. It is probable that the idea was taken from a Byzantine
model, as this style was much affected by the emperors of the East;
and on the Saxon penny the elaborate drapery and rigid outline of
figure are also characteristic of the art of the age of the Paleologoi.
On the reverse of this coin of the Confessor is the design of a cross
voided, between four martlets (Plate II, No. 45), and this is considered
to be the first indication of heraldic display on English coins, although
it should be remembered that the device was not appropriated to
heraldry until the reign of Henry III. in the thirteenth century, when
the science had become fully established in England. The varied
character of the types of the Confessor’s coins, at least, lifts their
designs from out of the purely conventional order into something, if
not artistic, at any rate distinctive and characteristic.

With the change of dynasty after the Conquest, it might be natural
to suppose that the polished Norman would have made a complete
change in the design and execution of the coinage and raised its art to a
higher plane; but, although such influences are very marked in architecture, the Norman money was allowed to remain identical in style and execution with the Saxon piece immediately preceding it. A comparison of the penny of Harold II., the last of the Saxon Kings (Plate II, No. 42), with that of the first type of William I. (Plate II, No. 43) will demonstrate this fact. Of Norman and early Plantagenet coins, whilst the issues of the Conqueror are by far the best from the standard of purity, execution and utility, some few of the many types of Henry I., as we should expect, certainly disclose an artistic revival unattempted since the days of Offa, but the remainder, as was the case during the reign of Rufus, show gradual deterioration until, in the troublous reign of Stephen, the lowest ebb of decay was reached (Plate II, No. 44). Many of the coins of this monarch and most of the early money of his successor, Henry II., were extremely ill-struck, very irregular in shape, and in many cases the inscriptions are nearly illegible. Henry II. appears to have realised the undesirability of this state of affairs, for, in 1180, he sent for a foreign artist, Philip Aymary of Tours, to improve the coinage. The designs of this artist met with general satisfaction at the time, and they continued to be used with very little modification for sixty or seventy years, although it must be admitted that conventionality of treatment, both of obverse and reverse, became, under this engraver, again pronounced (Plate II, No. 46). In 1248 a new coinage was issued, differing considerably from the preceding coinage both in design and workmanship. The lettering became more ornamental, and a long voided cross replaced the short cross on the reverse. A feature of interest was the addition of the word terci, or numerals indicating the same number, after the king's title as a qualifying number, inasmuch as this was the first time that a Sovereign, bearing the same name as a predecessor, was distinguished from him, an innovation, however, which was but short lived. The so-called gold penny of Henry III. was issued at this time, but it failed to attain popularity and was almost immediately discontinued.

In the next reign, that of Edward I., the obverse design on English coins was materially altered. The bust, although still conventional, was better drawn than those on the coins of his
After the Conquest.

predecessors. The hair is depicted in natural and flowing locks, according to the fashion of the day, whereas on the coins since A.D. 1180 this feature of the design had been represented by crescents, dots or circles, almost leaving it to the imagination of the observer that they are intended to represent hair. Similar attention was paid to the crown surmounting the bust on Edward's coins. Instead of the plain rows of pearls, or pellets and crosses which were intended to represent a crown on the late coinage, it now appeared as a true representation of the crown of the period. This was of an open form, decorated with fleurs-de-lys, and intermediate pillars supporting pearls (Plate II, Nos. 47 and 48). The obverse design of the pennies of Edward I. was so much superior to most former productions, that it evidently attained popularity, and was not displaced until the reign of Henry VII., lasting a period of over two hundred years. It is interesting, also, to notice that this coinage of pennies was extensively copied on the Continent, and especially in the Low Countries and Germany. Compare Plate II, No. 49.

The artistic improvement in the coins of this country during the reigns of Edward I. and his successors must be attributed, in a great measure, to the influence which the Crusades had upon commerce and the arts in Western Europe, which influence began to be felt here at the time of the later Plantagenets. The Crusaders brought back to Europe many Oriental objects, the designs on which furnished fresh ideas in the way of decorative art; whilst through the extension of trade, which was one of the most beneficent results of the great religious movement, a necessity arose, not only in this country, but generally on the Continent, for the issue of higher denominations than the penny, and a more uniform standard of currency both as to intrinsic value and design. To the time of Edward III., A.D. 1327 to 1377, the commercial needs of the English people had been met by the penny and its sub-divisions, but in and after his time higher denominations, such as groats and half-groats in silver; and in gold, florins, nobles and angels with their sub-divisions were issued. It is considered that the designs on these gold coins commence another epoch in art on the currency, viz., that of the later mediaeval, or flamboyant style, as it was called.
2. Later Mediæval Art.

This period extended from the reign of Edward III. to that of Henry VII., and the coins issued reflect, to a much greater extent than before, the artistic tendencies of the time. The simplicity of the earlier designs is replaced by a style of art which exhibits more decoration with greater attention to detail; and the same elaboration which is to be noticed in the architecture of the period, is also to be seen on the coinage. Heraldic devices, such as shields of arms, badges and crests, now became a prominent feature of the currency.

The silver coins of this period, which now comprised the groat, half-groat, penny, halfpenny and farthing, maintained the general designs of the penny of Edward I. which has already been described. They remained almost unchanged throughout the whole period, as may be seen if Plate II, No. 50, which represents an early groat of Edward III., is compared with Plate II, No. 51, which is a groat of Henry VII., struck at the commencement of his reign, although exactly a century and a half had intervened.

Of gold coins, the first issued in England during the entire mediæval period, if we except the gold penny of Henry III. previously mentioned, and which may almost be regarded as an essay or trial piece, were the florin, half-florin and quarter-florin. As these coins very admirably illustrate the art of the time, a more detailed description of their designs will be more instructive than any general remarks. The obverse of the florin shows the king crowned and robed, enthroned beneath a canopy, holding a sceptre in his right hand and an orb in his left; two leopards are placed one on either side of the throne, whilst fleurs-de-lys are sprinkled over the field. The reverse design presents a tressure of four curves with a beaded interior, foliated at the angles, containing a short cross with quatrefoiled and foliated ends and pierced with a quatrefoil; within each curve of the tressure is a crown, and outside each angle of the tressure is a lion or leopard. The half-florin shows, on the obverse, a leopard crowned with a banner bearing the arms of France and England quarterly, fastened to its neck and flowing back on its shoulders. The reverse design is very similar to
that on the florin. The obverse of the quarter-florin depicts a crowned lion standing on a cap of maintenance, surmounting a helmet, attached to which is the mantling or curtain which was worn both for ornament and as a protection against the sun. The field is strewn with lys. The reverse design consists of a short cross potent upon a beaded cross voided with foliated ends, and pierced with a quatrefoil.

The noble, half-noble and quarter-noble succeeded these coins, and became the only denominations of gold coins current until the reign of Edward IV., when they were superseded by the ryal, or rose-noble, with its half and quarter divisions, and these, in turn, gave place later in the same reign to the angels and angelets. The types of all these coins are well known. It will, no doubt, be agreed that the symbolical designs of the king in a ship on the noble (Plate II, No. 52), and of St. Michael spearing the dragon on the angel (Plate II, No. 53), are both striking and interesting. The meaning of the first-mentioned design may be open to question, but that of the latter will be found in Revelations xii, 7–9.

The best contemporary art is to be seen on the currency of this period, and some coins may, with justice, be called beautiful, as, for instance, the gold florin and noble of Edward III., which were superior to any gold currency issued on the Continent at that time. The reverse design of the latter is especially noticeable for its fine chasing, and the contrast between it and the silver coins, which had for so many centuries been the only currency of the country, seems to have greatly impressed the people, the more ignorant ascribing the new coins to the alchemists, who were supposed to have discovered the long-coveted secret of the philosopher's stone, and thereby the transmutation of base metals into gold.

The evidence of the coins and pieces of plate made by the English gold and silversmiths of these times shows that Italian and French metal-workers, then considered the best in Europe, had not unworthy rivals in this country. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that, although the designs on the coins struck during the period of later mediæval art are much superior to those of the preceding, an examination of them must lead one to the conclusion that they never
attained the decorative skill of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.


It was only during the third period of art on English coins, which commenced with that great European movement called the Renaissance, and extended to the time of the Commonwealth, that the best numismatic efforts in England, as on the Continent, were achieved. For this great revival we are indirectly indebted to the Turks, who, by their capture of Constantinople in 1453 and the consequent overthrow of the Eastern Empire, caused its Greek scholars to fly to Western cities, more especially to those of Italy, where they revolutionised art no less than literature. The characteristic feature of the Renaissance was its complete reaction against the tastes, ideals and habits of the middle ages; a distaste for the grotesqueness of mediaeval art and an awakened desire to return to form and elegance. In mediaeval art only the most primitive conceptions of natural surroundings and backgrounds are to be seen, whilst portraiture and perspective, or the realistic rendering of details, were not even attempted. On the other hand, the natural and non-conventional in art were the ruling traits of the Renaissance, and no figure was drawn but from an actual model, no face that was not a portrait, and no portrait that did not attempt to reveal character and disposition. In a word, a return to nature was effected, accompanied by a revival of the true science of design, which together produced accuracy and proportion. In the middle ages art turned towards religious expression, which, in architecture, attained to the highest degree of excellence. In the Renaissance, beauty of the human form, and a true delineation of natural objects, were mainly followed.

In England the effect of the revolution was felt later than on the Continent, and it was only after the conclusion of the Wars of the Roses, that those in authority had leisure to consider the changes which were being effected on the Continent. As we have seen, the art of coin engraving had lost all the perfection which had been reached by Greek and Roman artists, and although the money, especially the gold
In the Renaissance.

pieces, struck during the period of later mediaeval art were ornate and not unpleasing, nothing really artistic was produced in England until the time of Henry VII. To this king belongs the honour of placing the art of the engraver on a higher footing than was ever before attained in this country. The work of the English designers may be favourably compared with, and perhaps even be found superior to, that shown on contemporary foreign coins, with the exception of those struck in certain states of Italy, where the influence of the master art of Pisano and Matteo Pasti in the fifteenth century, and of Cellini in the sixteenth century, was more directly felt.

In this period also, the stereotyped restrictions of the currency, both as regards design and denomination, were abolished, and the great volume of different kinds of money, which was now issued, testified to the advance in the trade and prosperity of this country, whilst the designs on the coins indicated an equal advance in education and refinement.

To describe, or even to tabulate, all the different denominations of coins then issued, would be tedious and unnecessary for the purpose of this treatise, but the salient features of the art which is displayed on them should be considered. In common with sculpture and painting, the first, and perhaps the most important, change in the art on the coins of the period of the Renaissance is the introduction of genuine portraits. Until the reign of Henry VII, the king's bust on the coinage was, generally speaking, purely conventional, although some numismatists have endeavoured to trace a likeness of the sovereign on the better executed pieces of certain periods. For instance, Mr. W. J. Andrew, in his Numismatic History of the Reign of Henry I., quotes evidence to show that the bust on the penny of type 265 in Hawkins was a correct representation of the king as he appeared in his robes of state, although not actually a portrait. In many other instances attempts were, no doubt, made to reproduce the features of a reigning king, when they lent themselves towards his identification, as, for examples, the beard of the Confessor and the moustache of the Norman Conqueror; but beyond this, attempts at portraiture failed, for the early engraver had not sufficiently advanced
to reach that stage of artistic skill. In this respect the die-engraver was not alone, as it was only at the end of the thirteenth century that faces in painting, which up to that time had been entirely conventional in character, became animated into something of life-like expression. Giotto, who died in 1336, was probably the earliest artist who ventured to paint actual portraits. So far as the coins of England are concerned, a real authentic and correct portrait was not delineated until 1504, when an undoubted picture of Henry VII. was produced on the groat (Plate III, No. 54) and half-groat, and also on the shilling, a new denomination, the name of which had, up to that time, existed only as a money of account and not as an actual coin. The portrait on these coins was in profile, but in the reign of the next sovereign, Henry VIII., a front-faced bust was introduced (Plate III, No. 55). On the shillings and sixpences of Philip and Mary the busts of king and queen are represented as face to face (Plate III, No. 56), a style which, although unique in the English currency, was well known in Philip's Spanish dominions.

Another evidence of the outburst of art on coins during this period is the multiplication of the designs. On the gold currency the most striking was that of St. George in armour and on horseback spearing the dragon, which was adopted for the rare George noble of Henry VIII. It is interesting to notice that this design is the prototype of that subsequently produced by Piastrucci for the sovereign of George III., a design still used upon our coinage to-day. On the silver coinage, the principal additional design was that of the king on horseback, generally in armour, which characterised most of the crowns and half-crowns struck during the entire period. The reverses of the coins were also very varied in their designs. Their main character was heraldic; their main device, a shield of arms. Other devices included the Tudor rose and portcullis, whilst the lion and griffin sometimes appeared as supporters to the Royal arms.

These coins are valuable commentaries on armour and costume, and from this point of view are useful, inasmuch as, after the Renaissance period, the practice of delineating the sovereign in the costume of the day was discontinued. Much artistic skill was shown in these con-
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temporary coin-pictures of armour and dress. For instance, the silver
crown of Edward VI. (Plate III, No. 57), a denomination which then
came into the general currency of this country, admirably illustrates
the armour, both for horse and man, of the sixteenth century; and
the coins of Queen Elizabeth are noticeable for their striking
delineation of the queen in the royal costume of the period (Plate III,
No. 58). They well indicate that love of ostentation and display which
was one of the distinguishing characteristics of Elizabeth and her
times. This trait is specially pronounced in the three coins shown
in Plate III, Nos. 59, 60 and 61, all of which were struck in one
year, 1562, yet each shows the queen in a different costume. The
various changes of fashion in dress can also be traced on the coins of
Charles I., on which three or four such changes are noticeable. He
was first portrayed in the voluminous ruff which still survived from
Elizabethan times; then in a ruff of more modest proportions, and finally
in the simple falling lace collar so often shown on his portraits by Van
Dyck. This costume, known as the Van Dyck dress, was undoubtedly
the most elegant and picturesque ever worn by men in England.

It is interesting to notice that, although during this period
England was indebted to foreigners for its large artistic monuments
in painting, marble and bronze, most of the designs on the coins were
the work of native artists, as is indicated by the names of the
engravers of the dies. The earlier of these were Nicholas Flynte and
John Sharpe, who engraved for Henry VII. and Henry VIII.; whilst
among later artists may be mentioned Thomas Rawlins, who did much
good work for Charles I., and Thomas Simon. On the other hand,
Nicholas Briot was a Frenchman who, not considering his merits
sufficiently appreciated in his native country, offered his services
to Charles I. The King, a well-known lover of art, gave him employ-
ment in England, and in 1633 appointed him chief engraver to the
Royal Mint. Both Rawlins and Briot were, no doubt, influenced in
their designs of the portraits of Charles by the original paintings of
the celebrated Van Dyck; but whilst Briot's work is noticeable for the
neatness of its detail (Plate III, No. 62), it is less spirited than the
designs of the English engravers of his time.
The effect of the revival of art on English coins ceased to be felt after the reign of Charles I. It is well known that the government of the Commonwealth discouraged rather than fostered art, and this is reflected in the coins of the English republic, the designs on which are chiefly noticeable for their puritanic simplicity (Plate III, No. 63), although they were executed by Thomas Simon, the most celebrated of English medallists.

4. Modern Arts.

We now arrive at the consideration of the last period of art on English coins, that of modern art. Generally speaking this period is conspicuous for the stereotyped nature of the currency and its mechanical execution, the paucity and monotony of its designs and the spirit of imitation which it breathes. Two distinct styles of art are traceable on the coins of the period; both imitations of the antique. The first, or Roman style, extends to the reign of George III., and the second, or Greek, can be traced on the later coins of George III., and the pieces struck by his successors.

The bust showing the first style is laureated in the old Roman fashion and the shoulders, as regards the silver currency, are clothed in a conventional Roman mantle (Plate IV, No. 64), or, subsequently, in Roman armour (Plate IV, No. 67). The regal copper series, which was first issued by Charles II., bears a reverse design (Plate IV, No. 66), also undoubtedly suggested by the figure of Britannia as found on Roman coins (Plate IV, No. 65). This imitative Roman art was introduced for the coinage of the Protector, Oliver Cromwell, from France, where it came into vogue in the time of Louis XIII.

Cromwell’s coins were engraved by Thomas Simon and struck by the mill-and-screw process, which was re-introduced into England at this time, having previously been used for the production of a comparatively small issue of coins in the reign of Elizabeth. The module now adopted was, however, quite different to any that had preceded it, and with little variation was the pattern for the coins of the same denominations still in use. Simon was displaced by a Dutch artist named Roettier, who had come under the notice of Charles II. on
In the Georgian Period.

the Continent before his restoration to the throne. In artistic merit, however, Roettier's coins are inferior to those of Simon, and from this time the coinage shows a gradual deterioration if considered from the point of view of art alone.

This gradual decline was undoubtedly due to the fact that the inspiration of the Renaissance had become exhausted. For two hundred years Europe had subsisted on the fruits of this revival, until new forces and new interests were needed. These were supplied by the revival, in the middle of the eighteenth century, of the study of Greek literature and art which was mainly brought about by Johann Winckelmann, the leading art critic of his time. It must be borne in mind that the museums of northern Europe had not yet been founded, and most of the antique monuments were confined to Rome. Here they were supposed to have been the pure work of the old Roman civilisation, and the discovery, by Winckelmann, of the existence of a Greek form of art as perpetuated by Roman copies was a complete revelation to his age. This discovery opened a new sphere in the study of ancient monuments, and the taste for the ostentatious, so characteristic of the later times of the Renaissance, was changed to an appreciation of the virtues of repose and simplicity, as shown in the finest period of Greek art. The whole of Europe became saturated with a new impulse, resembling the Renaissance, and known as the Greek revival or Philhellenic movement. The influence of the movement on modern art was carried to a remarkable degree, and even in commonplace articles of every-day use no style of design was tolerated that was not an imitation of the Greek. The characteristic feature of the new movement was simplicity of form. In architecture Greek porticoes and colonnades were everywhere applied to modern buildings. The theatrical style of sculpture was abandoned in favour of the new, based on an imitation of Greek art, and in painting the same classical spirit showed itself. In the art of the coin engraver the result of the movement is seen in the abandonment of the conventional Roman style, for a more free conception of art guided by the simplicity of Greek models. Hence on the productions of the great recoinage of 1816 and subsequent years, a simple laureated and undraped bust is
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represented (Plate IV, No. 68), and, later, even the laurel wreath encircling the head of the sovereign disappears (Plate IV, No. 70). The St. George and Dragon design, before referred to, was treated in much the same manner (Plate IV, No. 68), whilst the Roman figure of Britannia on the copper series was furnished with a Greek helmet (Plate IV, No. 69).

The term of the Greek revival came to an end in the middle of the nineteenth century, when a new movement, generated by a study of mediæval history, resulted in an appreciation of mediæval literature and art. The seeds of this Gothic revival, as it was called, are credited with having first matured in Germany, but they soon spread throughout Europe, every country in turn taking to the study of its own mediæval past and deriving inspiration from it. The movement in England was, perhaps, earlier seen in the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott, which were the first works of English literature to draw popular attention to the middle ages. All this reacted on the forms of modern art. The great cathedrals, which had been almost ignored by the classical school of architecture and stigmatised as “only Gothic,” were now exalted above the imitative Roman arcades and Greek temples as models for architectural forms, and it would be difficult to specify an important church built after 1850 which does not exhibit one or other of the mediæval styles. The movement is, again, evident in the revival and appreciation of the science of heraldry; whilst in that of numismatics, the Saxon and early English coinage began to claim the attention of students at the expense of classical productions. In the designs of modern English coins, the simplicity of the Grecian feeling of art was first abandoned in favour of the mediæval style on the silver florin (Plate IV, No. 71), introduced in 1849, and on the well-known “Gothic crown,” Plate IV, No. 72. Beyond these, however, the movement is reflected by the coins to but a small degree. Indeed, the English coinage throughout practically the whole period of modern art has almost invariably consisted of the sovereign’s head on the obverse, and a shield or shields of arms on the reverse. Exceptions to this rule are the St. George and Dragon design reintroduced on the crowns and sovereigns of George III., and the royal crest, a lion
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surmounting a crown, on the later shillings of George IV. (Plate IV, No. 70), and again on the shilling of His present Majesty (Plate IV, No. 73). The copper coinage commenced with a reverse design of Britannia, and so it still remains.

The reason for this consistent character of modern coins is due to the utilitarian spirit of the times, and the necessity for a huge volume of money for the purposes of trade. It is necessary that the currency of the country as a purely circulating medium of exchange should conform to certain universally known standards of denomination to avoid confusion at home and abroad, and it is therefore of little value from an artistic or historical point of view. In the reign of Queen Anne, public attention was called to the desirability of raising the coinage above the level of a mere medium of exchange, and on several occasions since, members of various influential societies and of the general public have shown themselves not altogether indifferent to art on the coins of this country. For instance, in 1798, a circular was issued to the members of the Royal Academy inviting designs for coins so that the national money "might be improved in workmanship." This was just prior, and was perhaps one of the causes leading, to the influence of the Philhellenic movement on the coinage. Again, the hoarding of the lion shillings and sixpences of George IV., and of the so-called "graceless" florins of Victoria, testifies to the public interest shown in coin designs. It is within the memory of all, too, that the issue of 1893 was a result of the unpopularity of the Jubilee coinage of 1887, both as to obverse and reverse (Plate IV, No. 74).

That art has, to some extent, been forced to conform to certain recognised types for modern English coins is due to the necessity of adhering to standard designs, easily distinguishable in the various denominations for the purposes of exchange, rather than to the lack of artistic talent in the country, for, during the past century, many notable artists have been engaged in the preparation of the dies for our coinage; men celebrated in gem engraving, sculpture and painting. Of these, mention may be made of Kückler, who was responsible for the copper pennies and twopenny pieces of 1797; of Thomas Wyon, who was employed by George III.; of William Wyon,
an artist of exceptional merit during the reigns of George IV., William IV. and Victoria; of William Dyce, a Scottish artist who designed the "Gothic" florin of Victoria; of Thomas Brock, R.A., the designer of the bust of Victoria which appeared on the coins of 1893, and a sculptor of superior ability whose figure of Eve, exhibited in the Royal Academy exhibition of 1898, ranks amongst the most notable examples of modern art; of Sir E. J. Poynter, P.R.A., who contributed the reverse designs on the florin and shilling of the 1893 coinage; and, lastly, of George William De Saulles, who designed the coins of His present Majesty, Edward the Seventh.

It seems somewhat of a pity that the artistic abilities of these famous artists should have to be subservient, even in however small a degree, to considerations of utility and standardism, but it may be that in the near future some happy combination may yet be attained when the token of commerce may rank as the token of art, and the new design on the reverse of the present florin (Plate IV, No. 75) is a happy augury of this.

Let us trust that those who, in the distant future, look back as we do upon art and English coins, will always be able to quote the words of Pope:—

"The medal faithful to its charge of fame,
Thro' climes and ages bears each form and name;
In one short view subjected to our eye,
Gods, Emperors, Heroes, Sages, Beauties lie."

The sceattas, the Stephen penny, and several of the rare Saxon coins illustrated are in the collection of Mr. Carlyon-Britton; the gold noble was lent by Mr. Thomas Bearman, and the Offa pennies are impressions from coins in the British Museum. To these three sources, in addition to my own collection, I am therefore indebted for the illustrations given of the more important changes in the art of our coinage, and all the gentlemen concerned have my best thanks.