

REVIEWS

Art in Coinage, by C. H. V. SUTHERLAND. Batsford. 223 pp., 147 ill. 25s.

DR. SUTHERLAND here follows up his many important contributions to Roman, Romano-British, and Anglo-Saxon numismatics with a fine volume embracing virtually the whole wide range of coinage in Europe from its beginnings in the seventh century B.C. until the present day. There is a wealth of choice illustrations, for which alone one would hasten to acquire the book, all of them taken direct from the coins and usually enlarged (though occasionally there may exist better specimens than those actually used).

But it would be misleading to suggest that this book is a history of coinage. It is the aesthetic problems of the die-sinker which are its real theme—the formidable task of producing a living and convincing design within the restricted compass and circular shape of a coin flan. The artists of the ancient world had in one way greater freedom of action than their modern counterparts inasmuch as they disposed, virtually, of a literal extra dimension—very high relief, “the impact of sculptural technique” (p. 49). This kind of thing has never, since the decline and fall of the ancient world, quite returned to coinage; even the medal has rarely exploited this extra dimension at all fully (though there are of course extreme cases such as that of Sangallo whose medals are almost sculpture in the round). One wonders then if “relief-carvers” (p. 159) is quite the right term for the makers of those glorious Gothic coins of France and England in the fourteenth century (whatever the precise technique which they used—Dr. Sutherland thinks of dies made from puncheons carved in relief). Certainly, looking at these particular coins, one is not conscious of three-dimensionality (more, perhaps, of possible analogy with stained glass or tapestry than with sculpture); so that to that extent the author is perfectly justified in designating later achievements in the realm of coin-portraiture as being of a higher, because more complex, aesthetic value. Many will agree that the artistic problems have never been resolved better than by Simon, for one, in his portraits of Cromwell and Charles II, with their incredible variety of surface-texture and subtlety of modelling.

When it comes to the present day, Dr. Sutherland leaves us in little doubt that it is machinery and the reducing machine in particular that he blames for the inescapable impression of a decline in quality; though the arguments *for* the reducing machine are also given with scrupulous fairness. The designer of the modern coin has certainly no easy task; not only has he to produce something which will survive being “mechanized” but he also has to find—in company with any producer of “official” art—valid artistic concepts which are “officially” acceptable, a task not made any easier by the comparative confusion and lack of settled tradition in “pure” art.

Dr. Sutherland's presentation is unfailingly lucid and gracious: above all it stimulates thought. If we may comment on one or two minor points, it is a little surprising perhaps to find the word "portrait" so consistently used for representations of the gods on Greek coins, which may have led to a too ready acceptance of the view that heads of Zeus and Herakles on coins of Philip of Macedonia and of Alexander the Great are actually intended as quasi-portraits of those rulers. Then, the archaic Greek formula for showing four-horse chariots (actually, 2 horses+2 outlines = 4) might have been given a shade more explicitly: the "two horses" of the archaic style are referred to, but coin no. 22, which is relevant, shows not less than three horses' heads! But these are trifles, compared with the many striking and felicitous passages which we have good reason to remember; on the Hadrianic school, attaining a new life and freedom of style from its study of past styles (p. 91), on the hieratic force of the later Roman style with its return to the "sense of inward power" found in the earlier Greek work (p. 103), on the German medieval bracteates, artistically the most interesting coinage of the Romanesque period, on the highly interesting "Scottish Renaissance" of the sixteenth century—on all these and a hundred other topics, there will be few readers who will not find Dr. Sutherland's book a disclosure of new and exciting horizons.

K. J.

The "Ingots" and "Assay Office Pieces" of South Australia. By J. HUNT DEACON. Pp. iv+70, 4 plates and ill. in text. Hawthorn Press, Melbourne.

THE numismatic history of most of our Dominions and Colonies has yet to be written, and it is good to see the inauguration of a series which aims "to cover the most outstanding events in the history of the coinage and currency of Australia".

A wholly admirable start has been made in the work under review. The general background of the gold rushes is no doubt familiar to us, but here we see the problem from a new angle—that of the administration. Mr. Hunt Deacon unfolds in a clear and convincing manner, by means of official documents and the contemporary press, the economic crisis and its attempted solutions: first, the mass exodus of the working male population to the Victorian gold-fields, then the influx of a mass of un-negotiable bullion. The government was in a dilemma. If it converted the bullion into coin, it acted grossly *ultra vires*; if it took no steps to remedy the situation, it incurred the odium of the colonists. Official procrastination and expedient form the basis of an unusually fascinating chapter of numismatic history.

The second section is a descriptive catalogue of extant varieties and their imitations, and though the plates are not very clear, the book is a model of lucidity and thoroughness. A work of this character is addressed primarily to the student and historian. The rarity of the

series is such that collectors will require it as "background" only. But as the standard work on this aspect of Australian currency and economic development its supersession is unlikely, and it should be in the hands of all historians of the Commonwealth and students of the Imperial coinage. We look forward to the next volume in the series.

J. P. C. K.

Bank of New South Wales, *The Story of Currency in Australia*, 16 pp. ill.

It is a rare pleasure to find a bank taking a numismatic interest in the coinage it handles, and we therefore welcome the concise history of Australian currency in the book under review.

The contents call for little comment. Expression is clear and vivid—though the reproduction of the coins is deplorable—and will no doubt further the growing numismatic consciousness of Australia. A few errors have inevitably crept in. The recoinage of 1816/17 (the establishment of the gold standard) is confused with that of 1696/7 (demonetization of clipped silver), and the Royal Mint Report's (inaccurate) excursus into the Roman mint of London is repeated with further confusions.

Of particular interest to collectors is the list of mint-marks to be found on p. 14. Perhaps we may close with the reflection that the Dominion is still blessed with a partly silver coinage.

J. P. C. K.