

LECTURE I.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

UNDER the benign auspices of an institution, whose laudable object is the dissemination of such knowledge as may promote the general happiness of society, it has become my duty to discourse from this place on the art of ENGRAVING. I must beg leave to premise, that, *this* is not the place from whence to teach the attainment of practical excellence to students in the art; neither can I be supposed to have undertaken to inform masters of its theory. A short, but emphatic sentence of Dryden, (which he applies to the state and condition of painting in his time) contains, as I apprehend, a true specification of the object of my present undertaking. I must endeavour so “to discourse of this noble art, that those who before were rather fond of it, than

knowingly admired it, may defend their *inclination*, by their *reason*, that they may understand those excellencies which they blindly valued, so as not to be farther imposed on by bad pieces."*

The means whereby I propose to accomplish this object, are, to commence with an historical sketch of the progress of engraving, from its origin to the discovery of printing, (in the middle of the fifteenth century,) to follow this with explanations of the various modes of engraving that are practised, with a view to their being printed; and afterwards to dwell more particularly on such passages in the works of the several engravers, as may assist our critical knowledge of the art. I shall occasionally reflect on its moral influence and commercial importance, and inquire into their practical extension; and finally, shall attempt to ascertain and explain to you its theory.

If it shall be objected that the theory

* Preface to Dryden's *Du Fresnoy*.

which should form the critic, and that which should guide the practice of the student, are essentially the same, my reply will be, that *if* the student in engraving can derive benefit from any principles or rules that I may be able to suggest, I shall have but so much the more reason to be pleased with my efforts, and there is in the schools of this country no public Professor of the art, to complain that I have invaded his province.

Of the difficulties or ease of the task which I have undertaken, it would ill become me either to boast or complain: I shall endeavour to accomplish it to the best of my ability, and as it will be the *first* endeavour of the kind, I have reason to think that you will receive it rather with indulgence than with severity.

AMONG the various arts which, by the gradual development of human ingenuity, have decorated the fair fabric of civilized society, that of Engraving is one of the most ancient. It was the earliest mode which the mind suggested, and the hand of man attained, of imparting useful information and of displaying ornamental art: for the principal part of our knowledge of the only nations that have emerged to modern notice, from the dark regions of remote antiquity, we are indebted to engraven records: the precepts and laws of the ancients were engraven on stone or on metal; the poems of Orpheus and Hesiod are said to have been cut in lead, and the shields of Hercules, and the heroes who distinguished themselves in the early Theban wars,* as well as the more celebrated shield of Achil-

* In Eschylus's tragedy of the Seven Chiefs against Thebes, the heroes are severally known at a distance by the devices on their shields. Whether this poetical, be also an historical fact, the reader will determine.

les, are described as having been ornamented with heraldic and historical engravings.*

Some have even supposed the art to be of antediluvian extraction: the learning or credulity of Josephus, discovered one of the engraved pillars of Seth in a stone monument of Syria: whilst others, with as little probability or reflection, have imagined that the divine precepts which we are still taught to obey, and which are reported to have been "engraven by the finger of God," were the very first engravings produced, in point of time as well as importance: but however little an engraver might be inclined to doubt that *his* art has as fair a claim to divine origin as any other, he is compelled on the same unquestionable authority of the Pentateuch,†

* In the Essay prefixed to his Biographical Dictionary of Engravers, Mr. Strutt says, "it has been constantly understood by the generality of authors, both ancient and modern, that these shields were ornamented with engraving;" but the most classically learned of modern painters informs me, that the shield of Hercules was sculptured in low relief, with moveable parts that made a noise as it was shook by the hero.

† Genesis, ch. xxxviii. v. 18.

to admit that signets, which presuppose an art of engraving, were in use long before this awful and mysterious æra; yet were he disposed to contend with the painter for the palm of priority, he might do so with plausibility at least, since the Decalogue, which forbade the Israelites to worship *graven* * images, says nothing of the far more fascinating art of painting, so much more likely, had it existed, to have seduced them to idolatry. But, whether to delineate a form by incision, or by difference of colour, on a hard or a soft substance, was first invented, can now be of little consequence; and if we agree not to bewilder or protract our inquiry, by attending to miraculous communication, or legendary tales of antediluvian monuments, or the rival and doubtful claims of Persia and China to the most remote existence as nations, it will appear that the art of engraving, or of making intelligible incisions on hard and durable substances, originated either in India, or in Assyria, or in Egypt. It may possi-

* A very appropriate term for the hieroglyphic engravings of Egypt.

bly have travelled with the costly stones which were not uncommon in the patriarchal ages, from the mines of Hindostan ; and the Hebrew patriarchs, or their followers may have learned to practise this art, or at least to avail themselves of its useful and ornamental advantages, from their Assyrian ancestors, or from the Egyptians. According to Moses, Abraham, who sojourned in Egypt during a famine, was the son of a Chaldean ; Cedrenus* says further, that his father, Terah, was a maker of idols or household gods ; (which were either carved or engraven) and Dr. Hager, in asserting the high antiquity of the Assyrian empire, has produced a valuable compendium of Chaldean art and science. The remoteness of their astronomical observations, the early grandeur of their edifices, and the simplicity of a mode of inscription which does not appear to be borrowed from that of any other people, are strong arguments in support of his

* " Cedrenus asserts, that Serug and Terah, the progenitors of Abraham, were both makers of images ; and adds, that Abraham burnt the idols of Terah his father."—Hayley's Essay on Sculpture, p. 191.

opinion, that Assyria, (or Chaldea) of which Babylon was the original metropolis, was the most ancient of the Asiatic nations. Their inscriptions (if not their astronomical observations) evidently shew the previous existence of an art of engraving, being impressed from intaglio stamps on bricks found among the ruins of a very ancient and magnificent city, on the banks of the Euphrates, supposed to be Babylon. Of these bricks many have been brought to Europe, and some of them may be seen in the museum of the Hon. East-India Company, but their characters no person has yet been able to read.

The same collection contains also a much longer and more elaborate inscription, said to be Babylonian, and in *extraordinary* preservation. It is engraven on stone, and apparently with such a tool as engravers employ at present: its characters, like those on the Babylonian bricks, are formed as if of nails, or rather, I think, of arrow or spear heads; and the very learned superintendent of the museum, in his zeal for the records of antiquity, has had both this and

the inscriptions on the bricks accurately copied and printed on paper, in the hope that some person may be found who will be able to decypher their contents.

Having seen this curious engraving, I am free to confess that my own judgment would have led me to distrust its antiquity, had I not been taught rather to distrust my own judgment. The engraving seems very fresh, the accidental irregularities,* as well as the smoothened parts of its surface, are engraved over, and the stone, upon trial, was found to be soft. I should even have inclined to doubt whether a calcareous substance *could* have been preserved for so many ages under a mound of earth, without some transmutation of its substance—at least to the depth of the twentieth part of an inch from its surface, beyond which the engraving does not penetrate.

Comparing the inscriptions on the en-

* Those who had arrived at the art of cutting an inscription, could easily have squared a stone.

graved cylinders of loadstone, jasper, and chalcedony, in the British Museum, which are generally esteemed Persepolitan, with those on the Babylonian bricks, Dr. Hager has, I think, satisfactorily shewn, that their characters are Chaldean, or at least of Chaldean origin; and the surmise of Raspe, that they resemble the Chinese, and his inference that the Chinese character had formerly been known and cultivated to the west of the Ganges, can no longer be entitled to credit. It is far more probable that all the engravings with the arrow-head inscriptions are of Chaldean derivation, and as most of the cylindrical gems which exhibit these characters, are perforated longitudinally, and appear to have turned on a metal axis; they are as likely to have been used as seals, as they are to have been worn as amulets.

Of the early productions of Babylonian art, which have been ascribed to the magnificence of Semiramis, Diodorus has transmitted a very particular description. It is true, the mortal existence of the queen has

recently been denied;* the palaces of Assyria may perhaps be allowed to have stood on a firmer foundation.

“She built,” says Diodorus, “two palaces, one at each end of the bridge, upon the banks of the Euphrates: that on the west had a high and stately wall, upon which were portrayed in the bricks, before they were burned,† all sorts of living creatures, with great art, and in curious colours. This wall was in circuit forty furlongs, three hundred bricks thick, and in height one hundred yards, upon which were turrets one hundred and forty yards high. The third and innermost wall, which immediately surrounded the palace, was thirty furlongs in compass, and far exceeded the middle wall both in height and thickness.

* By Mr. Bryant, the boldest of modern mythologists.

† None of the Babylonian bricks brought to this country appear to have been burned by fire, but hardened by the intense heat of a vertical sun. If the Chaldeans laid them for this purpose on the plains of Shinaar, as they probably did, they might easily trace or engrave on them men, horses, &c. while in their moist state, of the very large dimensions that is here intimated.

On this wall, and on the towers, were represented the shapes of various animals, artfully expressed, and in most lively colours ; especially was represented a general hunting of wild beasts, each four cubits high and upwards, where Semiramis was to be seen on horseback, striking a leopard with a dart, and next to her, her husband, Ninus, in close fight with a lion."

In support of these remote and marvellous accounts, Diodorus cites an authority which has sometimes been doubted : but if we compare the disputed fragments of Ctesias* with an undisputed passage of the prophet Ezekiel, the account of the former will seem to be entitled to more credit than some commentators have been willing to allow him. It is worthy of observation, that the prophet is speaking expressly of the prone-

* Ctesias, a native of Cnidos, was the favourite physician of Artaxerxes, and had consequently far better opportunities of accurate information respecting the antiquities of this part of Asia, than the generality of classic authors could possess.

ness of the Jews to idolatry at a very early period: in the poetical elevation of the language of prophecy, he personifies Jerusalem, and says, that “when in her youth she saw men pourtrayed upon a wall—the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermilion,* all of them princes to look to, after the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of *their*† nativity, as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doated on them.”‡

The Ancient Universal History, in describing the costume of Assyria, (which does not appear to have materially differed from that of Persia) says, it was customary for the people to wear seal rings. If this be meant of the Assyrians of this early period, and be supported on good authority, we need

* It appears, from the united testimony of the prophet and the historian, that the incisions or impressions made in the bricks while in their moist state, were afterward filled with durable colour, like some of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, or as modern engravings on the precious metals are sometimes filled with enamel.

† *i. e.* of the nativity of the Jews.

‡ Ezek. ch. xxiii. v. 14, &c.

be at no further loss in accounting for the origin, either of this custom among the Hebrews, or for that of the art of seal engraving. In three generations from Abraham we read of a signet, which appears to have been a personal ornament, as well as an instrument of ratification; and when Moses had liberated the Jews from Egyptian bondage, and while they were yet wandering in the desert, he was directed, as we learn from the book of Exodus, "to make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, "Holiness to the Lord." He was also ordered to take "two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel, according to their birth, with the work of an engraver (or plougher) on stone, like the engravings of a signet."

Of the artists who executed these and some other of the engraved ornaments of the high priest, Moses has repeatedly made very honourable mention. Bezaleel, who appears to have been acquainted with the arts of the jeweller and lapidary, as well as

that of the engraver, is described to have been "filled with the spirit of God in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, to devise cunning works; to work in gold, in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones to set them; and it was put into his heart that both he and Aholiab might teach *them that were filled with wisdom* to work all manner of work of the Engraver:"* a restriction which there is abundant room to wish had continued to be observed, since it is certain that many of those who have shewn themselves filled with folly, have since been initiated into the mysteries of Bezaleel and Aholiab.

However this may have been, the scriptural accounts of the engraving of precious stones in and before the time of Moses, are accurately detailed, and as they shed no inconsiderable light upon the migrations of art, and the history of man, are curious and important: yet, curious and important as they must be allowed to be, they are presumptively of

* Exodus, ch. xxxv.

far less antiquity than the hieroglyphic engravings, that still cover with a veil of mystery the colossal wonders of the successive capitols of Egypt.

The very ingenious Mr. Raspe has drawn a plausible inference in favour of his opinion, that India was the parent of Gem-engraving, from a local circumstance. The art of engraving on substances which only the diamond can penetrate, and only the peninsula of India could supply, he seems to think could have originated in no other country. Commerce, attendant upon the extending pomp and luxury of the East, gradually transported these precious materials to the west and to the north; but the speculations of the Egyptians, according to Mr. Raspe, would never have induced them to break diamonds, or stamp them in mortars, for the purpose of trying experiments; such speculations are more rationally to be expected in the neighbourhood of the mines of Golconda, the native country of the diamond and other hard stones, where their properties and beauties must be ascertained

before they could become objects of exportation. In a subsequent part of his Essay he speaks of Hindoo engravings, and particularly of a lion in emerald in Mr. Wilkins's collection, different in style, but equal in merit, to the early gems of the Egyptians.

Ancient Hindoo gems, however, are very scarce in comparison with the gems of Egypt, or even with those esteemed Persepolitan; and when the imperishable nature of their substances is considered, their scarcity is certainly no corroboration of Mr. Raspe's hypothesis. Indeed, much as the tenor of this gentleman's treatise is to be admired, I cannot think his *reasoning* in this place will safely carry us farther than to shew the Hindoo extraction of the lapidary's process, which in all probability *was* invented before the engraver had learned to exercise his art on the precious materials produced from the mines of Hindostan.

But perhaps even the lapidary's process was not at that time performed by means of diamond powder. It appears to me more

probable that the Corundum stone (commonly termed adamantine spar) was used both by the Hindoo lapidaries and the engravers of Egypt: this spar has not been known in England above thirty five years, and was very imperfectly known until about six years ago, its history and properties were communicated to the Royal Society by the Hon. Mr. Greville, on unquestionable authorities transmitted from India. It is at present employed in the cutting and polishing of precious stones, by the Indian lapidaries, and also by those of China, and has been so employed from time immemorial: it is, of all substances, in point of hardness, next to the diamond, and consequently will operate on all stones that are less hard, and as it is found in great quantities in the peninsula of India, where the natives use it as we do emery, it is very likely to have been carried along with the precious stones to Egypt; or it is even probable that Egypt itself produces the Corundum stone: from Mr. Greville's memoir, combined with what is mentioned in the Encyclopædia Britannica under the article

“Emerald,” I am inclined to think, that if the famous emerald mine in the Thebaic desert should be re-discovered, its product would be found to be no other than the green Corundum stone. Pliny* informs us that the Romans used to import sand for the purposes of cutting and polishing hard stones, from Ethiopia and from India, which sand was probably no other than the grit or powder of Corundum. Had the Egyptians possessed any better means of effecting this purpose, it would probably have been transmitted through the Greeks, and Pliny would have known and mentioned it.

The birth-place of engraving is obscured by clouds, which its own productions can alone dispel. At present there is an apparent, and perhaps a real, preponderance of evidence, in favour of the opinion, that the antiquities of Upper Egypt are covered with the earliest productions of this art, and the enthusiasm or observation of Denon has taught him to think they will re-

* Nat. Hist. b. xxxvi. c. 1. 6.

main to the latest periods of time. On each of their enormous blocks Denon fancied he could see *Eternal duration*, deeply engraven! Even less fervid imaginations than that of this celebrated French traveller, must be struck with the magnitude, the remoteness, and the obscurity of these sublime monuments! Having survived the meaning they were evidently intended to transmit, their very silence may seem to some minds to check the vain hope of terrestrial immortality; while to the better hopes of the antiquarian philosopher, they appear to contain a latent light-invisible, and if the zodiac of Dendera has lately been relumined by a distinguished antiquary of our own country, we may surely indulge the hope that the vast volumes of information presumed to be contained in these engravings will finally be developed.*

* See the Rev. Mr. Henley's very learned dissertation on this subject, in the *Philosophical Magazine*, and also, if I mistake not, in the *Archeologia* of the Antiquarian Society.

In the necessary moral and physical unfolding of the human powers, the attempt to describe and perpetuate a favourite idea by delineating its form, is so simple, when compared with the stupendous and intricate construction of an alphabet, that we cannot hesitate to suppose, that hieroglyphic, or picture, writing, or engraving, must have long, very long preceded the invention of letters: both the old and new worlds unite in attesting this as a fact. The hard and beautiful stones, then, cut and polished in India, when transported to Egypt as articles of regal splendour, would naturally have stimulated the Egyptian engravers (even if we suppose them to have been already acquainted with a substance sufficiently hard to operate on the basalt, granite, and porphyry, which their own country produced) to inquire into, and discover, the means of rendering these seemingly impenetrable substances subservient to the powers and purposes of their art, and having discovered them, the engravers would bestow on such costly materials, the highest efforts of their skill.

The rudest hieroglyphic signets, of which some are still preserved in the British and other celebrated museums, are coarsely engraved on jaspers and cornelians, (burnt, perhaps in order to render them softer) and apparently with a smaller tool of the same kind as that with which the Egyptians began the manual part of their work, when they converted their obelisks, sarcophagi, and the interiors of their temples, into books of history, biography, and astronomy. It is obvious that in engraving works so large as the latter, the lathe and wheel could not have been employed, and those who are sufficiently interested in these distinctions, to inspect and compare the scarabees and other hieroglyphic gem-engravings in our national collection, may remark some, where the operation of a tool impelled by sudden blows, and the very early state of art, are equally evident: yet it is but fair to state in exception, that I observed the hieroglyphic inscriptions on the Canopuses in the very select and classic collection of Mr. Thomas Hope, to have the same rough and chipped

edges, though these latter are certainly of later date. On the whole, there appears good reason to presume that hieroglyphic engraving, both minute and colossal, was practised in Egypt before the introduction or invention of letters, or diamond-powder, or the seal-engraver's lathe and wheel.

Of what metal or other substance their gravers or scorpings-tools were formed, or, if of metal, how they were tempered, I have not been able to discover. It is generally supposed that, even in the present improved state of chemistry, steel cannot be rendered at once so hard and so tough as would be necessary to penetrate porphyry or jasper; yet we know of nothing capable of being converted into a scorpings-tool that is better suited to the purpose, and the following remarkable passage in the book of Job, may incline us to acquiesce in the idea that steel was used, while at the same time it informs us that the whole process was not performed by it. The poem of Job is supposed, on the best authorities, to be of a date anterior to the promulgation of the

Jewish laws, and it will be obvious that the passage in question alludes to the early mode of inscription which we are now considering, and also, if I am not mistaken, to the hieroglyphic engravings of the Egyptians. “ Who shall ordain now, that my words shall be *drawn*? who shall give that in a memorial that they shall be *delineated*? that with an *instrument of iron, and lead*, they shall be cut out in the rock for ever!”*

The most simple and obvious construction we can put upon this passage is—not that the same instrument was constructed partly of iron and partly of lead; nor that it was an iron pen, (as it is rendered in the vulgar translation) but, that the hieroglyphics were first cut in the rough with an iron or steel instrument, probably urged by a mallet, such as is used by the statuaries of the present day, and afterward finished more carefully by the friction of some hard substance reduced to powder and applied with

* Job, ch. xix. v. 23, 24.

lead; for the softer* or more porous the metal with which it is applied, the more rapidly will the friction operate; and perhaps the powder of the Corundum stone may have been used by the Egyptian engravers, on their large as well as small works, from the very commencement of the art.

In the course of revising and adding to this lecture, since I had the honour of delivering it last season, and in consulting and comparing the various authorities to which it became necessary to refer, I have seen that the learned author of the "MUNIMENTA ANTIQUA," whose opinions must ever be entitled to the most respectful notice, has conceived, that a *certain preparation* of lead was used in engraving these works. His words are: "I have been informed by Dr. Moyes, one of the most learned and ingenious chemists of this age, that a certain preparation of lead, rubbed

* Lead and copper are still used for similar purposes by the lapidaries and seal-engravers.

with a blunt iron tool, will quickly wear away the hardest basalt or granite; which circumstance may account for the manner in which the ancient hieroglyphic Egyptian figures were wrought on stones which no modern tool hardly will touch."* I must reluctantly observe here, that it would have been more becoming the high character of one of the most learned and ingenious chemists of the age, if Dr. Moyes had informed us *what* † preparation of lead would have this effect: I could then have compared his hypothesis with my own, by submitting both to the unequivocal test of experiment.

An examination of that ponderous and magnificent trophy of British enterprise and valour, which has been called the sarcophagus of Alexander, and is now, with bolder erudition, affirmed to have been also that of the patriarch Joseph, will tend to corroborate the opinion which I offer as my

* *Munimenta Antiqua*, vol. i. p. 4. note.

† A chemical friend of mine suspects that the calx of lead had been tried, and found to have some effect.

own, of the mode of working employed by the Egyptian engravers. On the outside of the lower end, and in several other parts of this surprising piece of antiquity, there occur certain unfinished passages, where the more violent operation of a tool, impelled by sudden blows, is evinced by the chippings and roughness of the edges of the imperfect hieroglyphics.* The difference between these passages, and the hieroglyphics which cover the rest, and particularly the inside of the sarcophagus, and are finished with considerable care and precision, would be sufficient, I should presume, to establish the opinion of its being an unfinished performance, if not that which I have ventured to advance of their mode of engraving: though with all that can be said or conjectured on the latter subject, it should be re-

* As much of this appearance as could be copied on a reduced scale, may be traced in the aquatinta print [exhibited at the time of reading the lecture] which Mr. Medland has engraven of this sarcophagus from the very accurate drawing of Mr. Alexander: but those who are deeply interested in the subject will do well to examine the original.

collected, that patience and perseverance have been in all countries virtues of early growth, and perhaps the patience and perseverance of Egypt might justly claim much of the superiority which modern lassitude is willing to ascribe to their instruments.

At this early period, the gem-engravers of Egypt appear to have conceived no higher ideas of excellence, than consisted in inscribing on the oriental precious stones in intaglio, such memorials of science and superstition as their priests and astronomers wished to transmit, and as could be designated by their real or imaginary resemblance or analogy to visible objects, or by some connexion arbitrarily imposed. This must have been at the first so very rudely performed, that what was intended to represent one object gave the idea of another, and perhaps was by a second observer mistaken for something else. It may be seen that their early representations of visible nature, were as remote from accuracy as those of children and savages:

hence the necessity of having their works understood would, in process of time, give birth to the establishment of diagrammatic conventional signs, (a grasshopper, an ibis, or any other object, must be engraven with undeviating precision, according to a prescribed form) which, it has been very judiciously conjectured, the authority of the Egyptian priesthood, co-operating with the real or mistaken interests of society, would easily accomplish, and which is strongly attested by the exact similarity of the recurring hieroglyphics.

From these powerful causes, ancient engraving appears to have remained for centuries in a state of Egyptian bondage, from which she was at last liberated, partly by the invention of letters, and partly by the genius of Greece.

Such appears to me to be the least exceptionable mode of accounting for the origin and early progress of engraving. If I have not taken a wider retrospect, I must beg to have it recollected, that the question

of the Egyptian, Chaldean, and Hindoo claims to the most remote existence as nations, has long baffled the learned, and may still be considered as the darkest and most intricate of the labyrinths of antiquity.

Of the gems which are spoken of about five or six centuries after the period to which we have been attending—*if* such gems existed, among the personal ornaments of Helen and Ulysses; Helen's might have been an intaglio of Egyptian workmanship, but that of Ulysses was more likely the work of some Greek, or of some Sidonian engraver: the dolphin which is said to have brought Telemachus ashore from a situation of great danger, formed the device, and it was worn by the father in grateful testimony of the miraculous preservation of his son.

I have said, if such gems existed, because the authorities of Plutarch, and Ptolemy-Hephæstion, who alone have mentioned these facts, have sometimes been questioned: but the same enlightened antiquary

and scholar, who has strongly expressed to me his doubts of their truth, has pointed out some other classical engravings which are mentioned by Homer, and are not less worthy of your notice : he has also assisted my inquiries by the liberal communication of his sentiments, and confirmed my opinions, by their concurrence with his own, respecting the celebrated shield of Achilles.

When the disguised Ulysses is describing to Penelópe the dress worn by her husband at the Cretan court, he says, according to Pope's translation :

—————“ Illustrious on his breast,
The double-clasping gold the king confest,
In the rich *woof* a hound, mosaic drawn,
Bore on full stretch, and seiz'd a dappl'd fawn.”

I am informed, that in the original, this hound and fawn are not mentioned as being *embroidered* on the robe, but as *engraven* on the double-tongued broach, or breast ornament, with which Penelope says she herself fastened his robe, when Ulysses de-

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parted from Ithaca on the Trojan expedition.

Sidon appears to have been about this time a principal seat of decorative art. The engraved cup which Telemachus received from Nestor, was the work of a Sidonian artist; and the silver bowl with which he was presented by Menelaus, "from Sidon's hospitable monarch came." Indeed the repeated mention which Homer makes of this place, its artists, its workmen, and its productions in ivory and the various metals, may incline us to think that the materials imported at Tyre at this remote period, were, in part at least, manufactured at Sidon, and that these cities were respectively the emporia of the arts and commerce of the ancient world; while a British poet might indulge or deplore the idea that Phœnician commerce, had supplied the heroes of Homer, and the arts both of ornament and destruction, with materials from the mines of his own country.

In the far-famed shield of Achilles, the

arts of inlaying the incisions of the graver with tin, gold, silver, steel (lowered to a purple,) and occasionally with some black substance, were added to that of engraving; all were united in a degree of perfection that appeared godlike! and when its elaborate finishing is considered, and the vast quantity of subject matter which its area was made to contain, the combination of art displayed on this shield must surely appear so still. But both Le Clerc and Vleughel in their etchings, and Pope in his annotations on the Iliad, (though he consulted, and is supported in his opinion by Sir Godfrey Kneller) seem to be mistaken in supposing the shield to have been divided into equal compartments, each subject forming a separate picture, and occupying a sectorial space round the sun, moon, and constellations, which they supposed to have been embossed in the centre.

It is far more probable that Homer intended we should read the whole contents of the shield at a single view, and in its upright position, or, as it would appear,

when suspended on the arm of Achilles. The simplicity of Grecian art at this early period ; its Egyptian derivation ; the silence of Homer as to lines of demarcation ; the absurdity and difficulty of contracting some of the subjects and enlarging others, so as to fill equal compartments, (which would have obliged the artist to diminish most the subjects of most importance,) and the necessity there would have been to turn round the shield in order to read it, all conspire to persuade us that the several subjects were represented on the same field, in the manner of what is now termed a bird's-eye view of an extensive country—the horizontal line of the sea being very high in the picture, and bounding the terrestrial part of the prospect. We have frequently seen Chinese porcelain, screens, &c. painted on this principle, with towns, capes, and various other objects jutting out from either side ; and we have recently seen our own river Thames winding through this very metropolis and its environs, with other works of great merit, very scientifically represented on this principle by Mr. William Daniell.

“ The indefatigable sun, the full-orb'd moon, the northern constellations, and the heavens,” (or clouds) would, according to this supposition, occupy the segment, or arch, above the horizontal line, constituting the upper part of the shield; the *town in peace*, with its senate and assembly of the people, &c. and the *town in war*, with its ambuscade and battle, would fill the broader and more central part; the *agricultural employments* would follow successively in the order of the poem, while the *river*, which Homer mentions as mæandering through the scene, would help to keep its parts distinct, and the *dance*, which he has finished with great attention to the minutiae, constituting the fore-ground, would fill the remainder of the shield—the whole being encircled (if it were a circle) with a simple waving line, such as is now very fashionable, and as frequently occurs on the Greek and Etruscan antiquities by way of border.

But the arts both of Phœnicia and Greece originated in Egypt. The same people

who imparted the rudiments of their religion and philosophy to the Greeks, placed in their hands those instruments of art, which, on account of their extreme simplicity even at present, can have undergone but little variation from the beginning. We have seen that with these they had made considerable advances towards excellence, even before the age of Homer: but with Homer and Nature for their archetype and guide, and with a system of heroic sentiment and poetical mythology to stimulate their exertions, they discovered and adopted such modes of study, as gradually enabled them to accomplish those works which have commanded and received the warm and genuine admiration of each succeeding age, in proportion to the correctness and refinement of its knowledge and taste. From the top of Parnassus, Homer pointed out those sublime paths which finally conducted Phidias to the highest summit of Olympus, and empowered the Grecian artists to legislate for ages the most distant and countries the most remote!

The complaints against the ruthless and unsparing hand of Time, should be hushed by the recollection, that twenty centuries have elapsed, and the supreme beauty of the Medicean Venus is still unimpaired; the divine majesty of the Apollo has firmly withstood the efforts of the destroying power, and even the more complicated pathos of the Laocoon exists nearly in its original perfection; while of those minute and exquisite cameo and intaglio engravings, where the richness and beauty of the materials, is only inferior to the skill of the artists, thousands may yet be seen with undiminished delight, in the classic cabinets of the Marlboroughs, the Carlises, and the Townleys of every civilised country of Europe.

The earliest Greek engravings extant, are performed on scarabees, (which attest their Egyptian extraction,) and are in point of drawing, little better than the hieroglyphics: they shew, however, that Greek genius laboured already to extend the graphic art to portraits and historical subjects; which

is proved beyond all controversy, by the additions of the names of Tydeus, Achilles, &c. which are inscribed in the early Greek character on their respective gems.

In somewhat less than five centuries from the æra of Homer, though perhaps at a still earlier period, the art shone with a transient splendour, (which is pathetically lamented by Mr. Hayley) in Etruria. He thinks Etruria

“ Might have vied with Attica in art,
Had she not fallen in her early bloom,
The stript and mangled slave of barb'rous Rome.”

And the collection of the antiquities of that country, deposited in our national museum by the late Sir William Hamilton,* are the strongest confirmation of the truth of Mr. Hayley's conjecture.

The father of Pythagoras the Wise, was a

* Though many of these are since known to be Greek, some are undoubtedly Etruscan.

seal-engraver of this period, and is claimed by the Etruscans as their countryman; and soon after (between the fiftieth and sixtieth Olympiad) lived Theodore the Samian, who engraved a famous emerald ring for the tyrant Polycrates, and who has been confounded with a real or fictitious Theodore of much earlier date, the reputed inventor of the turning-lathe, and lock and key.

“That art is long and life is short,” has been often repeated. It was still an hundred and fifty years before Greece attained that exalted perfection, which it has been the custom of those professional writers, who have chosen art for their subject, (and whom we may regard as travellers in a foreign country, intent only upon its wonders,) to speak of, as if it were the lofty summit of an Alpine mountain, scarcely accessible, and perfectly untenable; for, having attained this elevated station, art, they say, must necessarily decline. But it should rather be represented as resembling those vast and elevated plains of South America, replete with other than superfi-

cial riches, inexhaustible in the variety of their productions, and whose extent no eye can discern. To believe that the utmost hope of our studies is to appreciate merits that modern art must despair to rival, can have no beneficial consequence. It is not only more consolatory to artists, and more gratifying to man, but it has also been demonstrated to be more in accordance with truth and nature, to believe that Greece might have attained, (and that England may attain,) a more varied, if not a more exalted perfection in art, than we trace even in the inestimable remains of Grecian antiquity. To produce a continued or increasing effect, there must exist a continually-operating cause, tantamount to its production: if that cause be removed, the effect must cease, and it has been eloquently observed by a powerful and consummate artist and scholar, that, when the spirit of liberty forsook the public, grandeur had left the private mind of Greece. Subdued by Philip, the gods of Athens and Olympia migrated to Pella; and when Alexander became the representative of Jupiter,

we are not to wonder that rhetoric mimicked the thunders of oratory; that sophistry and metaphysic debate were substituted for that philosophy which had guided life, and that the grand taste which had dictated principle to art, began to give way to turgid hyperboles and the little-nesses of false refinement.

Lysippus, however, the first of gem-engravers, and the firm adherent of truth, who lived at this æra of adulation, nobly reprov'd Apelles for this instance of his flattery to Alexander, and Mr. Hayley has recorded the circumstance, and the general praise of Lysippus, in a style analogous to his subject. He says :

“ Ever, Lysippus! be thy name rever'd,
 By moral dignity of mind endear'd!
 Glory, well pleas'd, thy double worth beheld,
 The matchless artist by the man excell'd;
 Thy upright spirit,—————
 Scorning to favour impious pride's pretence,
 Reprov'd thy friend Apelles, that he strove
 To lavish lightning on a fancied Jove;
 And to thy statue, rationally grand,
 Gave the just weapon of a hero's hand.
 Thy taste ador'd—————
 TRUTH, as the fountain both of art and fame.”

The decline of those virtues which operated to produce the perfection of the fine arts in Greece, may be dated from the time of Pericles; the decline of the arts themselves from that of Alexander. The retreat, however, of Athenian excellence, was firm, slow, intrepid, and tempered with conscious worth, like that of their brave ten thousand under Xenophon: like the ebbing ocean, it retired with majesty, continuing to the time of the Cæsars to roll back forms of surprising grandeur and inimitable beauty!

The retreat of liberty and the arts, made way for the successive conquests of Sicily and Macedonia, and the destruction of Corinth; and the sculptured heroes and deities, as well as the living artists of Greece, served to swell the military triumphs of the new mistress of the world: but the triumphs of mere brutal strength, when intellect is his victim, are the real disgrace of man; and since so many gems and other illustrious examples of excellence have descended to us, it may be said that Grecian

art, even in its minutest operations, has more permanently, as well as more honourably, triumphed in its turn, over the giant power and barbarian arms of its Roman conquerors.

It is well known that the fine arts never flourished in ancient Rome. Augustus was indebted for that portrait of himself which he used as a signet, to the exotic skill of Dioscorides, the power to execute which was denied to the palsied growth of the indigenous art of the country. Augustus, though blessed with the society, and aided by the powers, of Virgil and Horace, Mecænas and Ovid, and though ambitious of being esteemed the protector of talent, could not, as has been well observed, "raise a Lysippus out of Roman clay."

The delicate plants which Mecænas, and the rest of the tasteful critics of the Augustan age, had laudably transplanted to Rome, and endeavoured to cultivate; withered under the baleful influence of the adulation exacted by the successors of Augustus, or were

blasted by their tyranny. The sublime principles which taste and philosophy during the succession¹ of so many centuries, had gradually elaborated from the system of nature and the elements of art, were superseded by the frigid and ignorant imitations, of men who wondered much, because they knew little, and were compelled by contemporary critics and collectors of Grecian art, to perceive, or at least to acknowledge the immense disparity between their own efforts, and the bright examples of Grecian excellence, which adorned the cabinets of the great: and while attention and criticism were dissipated in petty efforts to appreciate the degrees of Roman approximation to the great standards of the Greeks, emulation sunk in despair, or was overwhelmed by affectation and false refinement.

Mankind have so long been accustomed to bestow liberal applause upon their destroyers rather than their benefactors, that we may be allowed to dwell yet somewhat longer upon the philosophy of this part of

our subject. The fine arts, which, if cultivated and encouraged upon 'legitimate principles, might have perpetuated the power of Rome, obedient to the dictates of truth, have commemorated her disgrace with her triumphs. Those arts, whose energies alone could have checked or absorbed the ambition of her crazy and intoxicated tyrants, and the superfluous wealth of her aggrandized citizens, and thus have prevented, or at least have retarded, her ruin; from being too late and injudiciously attended to, became the flatterers of vanity, instead of the monitors of virtue. The decorations, the riches, and the defence of Syracuse, should have made Rome sensible; as the balance of *power*, which Providence has ordained shall preponderate with the arts, should make modern Europe sensible, that the increase of physical, as well as of moral strength, is always consequent to real improvement in art and science: that increase of strength was lost to the Roman people, and the degradation of the empire, followed or kept pace with the perversion of art.

Of the Roman gems engraven in the reign of Tiberius, which have since been found in the dark recesses of Caprea, I shall say nothing—but that they are, in more than one respect, too bad to be objects of our present attention.

That talent for art, which the taste and authority of Mecænas and Augustus had failed to produce, was not likely to be afterwards excited by the mere influence of fashion. The luxury of wearing both cameo and intaglio engravings set in rings, which began during the republic, went on increasing under the emperors, notwithstanding its excess was satirized by Juvenal. Profusion is not elegance; and Pliny says that the Romans *loaded* their fingers with princely fortunes. The same taste and the same profusion, gradually extended itself to the bracelets, ear-rings, clasps, &c. of the women's dresses, and to the helmets, breast-plates, sword-handles, scabbards, and even the saddles of the military; and the robes, gowns, and shoes of the wealthy and the great, were richly set and variegated with

engraved stones, while the larger cameos had their places in the cabinet-work and furniture of their houses; and thousands of gems set in gold and silver goblets and vases, glittered on the side boards of the opulent, or shone in the temples of the gods.

Even the poorer ranks caught a taste for engraved rings, and as they could not purchase fine stones, the mode of imitating or casting such in coloured glass was invented; which has been remarked as an important event in the history of engraved gems. Their colour and brilliancy were thus imitated, and the beauty of workmanship of the originals preserved with tolerable fidelity. These are now called ancient pastes; they are not unfrequently found in the vases of antiquity, and the art of casting them has been re-discovered, and is at this time exercised in great perfection by the ingenious Mr. Tassie, whose recent good fortune*

* When this discourse was first delivered, Mr. Tassie had just been declared the fortunate possessor of the Shakespear Gallery prize.

has diffused a general sentiment of pleasure among his friends and acquaintance.

We have now traced this art through the first cycle of its revolutions, guided chiefly by its own inherent light. Like the great source of light, the art of engraving arose in the East: its first faint dawnings were reflected in the Ganges, the Euphrates, and the Nile: the obelisks of Upper Egypt are its primæval beams, and the cavern temples of Isis and Osiris absorbed the radiance of its morning: it afterward shone successively in Persia, Etruria, and Phœnicia; and gilding Ionia and the Greek islands with un fading glory, passed through the constellation of Athens with a splendour so unspeakable, that the brightest emanations of Roman art grew dim and finally disappeared in its intensity!

If the plunder of vanquished Italy is even at this time operating a similar subjugation of taste and style on the art of our transmarine rivals; let us not triumph in what is not the honourable result of our own exertions:

let us rather reflect whether every age of art has not its appropriate pabulum, which may best continue its existence, and promote its growth. Let us pause ere we place nectar and ambrosia in the mental nursery—Let us study what is fit for ourselves.