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THE
FORGERIES OF PUBLIC MONEY,

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE
THE NUMISMATIC SOCIETY, APRIL 23, 1843.

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“Quidnam erit tutum si in nostra peccetur effigie? et quam subjectus
corde venerari debet manu sacrilegia violare festinet?”

CASSIODORUS, Lib. vii. Ep. xxxii.

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ON THE FORGERIES OF PUBLIC MONEY.

It has been remarked by Neumann, that the art of counterfeiting the public money is of the highest antiquity.¹ His authority for such a statement is the quantity of forged examples which have descended to our times, some of them being imitations of authorised coins of a very remote period. That this base practice was resorted to in the earliest times may be inferred from the laws of Solon, six centuries before the Christian era. By these laws, forgers of the public money were punished with death.²

An early notice of the use of false money occurs in Herodotus, who tells us (though he himself discredits the story), that it was reported of Polycrates that he purchased the retreat of the Lacedemonians, when before Samos, with a number of coins struck in lead and plated with gold.³

Offences against the coin were, in all ages, visited by the severest punishment, being justly considered both pernicious to the state, and a direct interference with the prerogative of the sovereign himself. Among the

¹ Infamis ars pelliculatos numos fingendi, id est, æreos vel plumbeos tegendi lamina argentea vel aurea, pene rei monetariæ initiis cœvna est.—*Romanorum Numi Anecdoti*, p. 197.

² Demosthenes, *Orat. adv. Timocrat.*, sect. 49.

³ ὡς δὲ ὁ ματαιότερος λόγος ὤρηται, λέγεται Πολυκράτεια ἐπικώριον νόμισμα κόψαντα πολλὸν μολύβδου, καταχρυσώσαντα, δοῦναι σφι' τοὺς δὲ, δεξαμένους, οὕτω δὴ ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι.—*Thalia*, lvi.

Romans, false coiners and those who harboured them were alike open to impeachment by any person; and the accuser was amply rewarded according to his condition, free persons being exempted from taxes and tributes, and slaves receiving their freedom. The forger was denied an appeal to the emperor, and death was awarded to those who permitted the accused to escape from custody;⁴ even general pardons did not include the forger.⁵ In the consular times false coiners, if freemen, were condemned to the beasts, while slaves were punished with death. The laws of Constantine the Great adjudged false coiners to be guilty of high treason, and condemned them to be burnt alive. Beauvais, in his interesting treatise on the revenue and false money of the Romans, observes, that Ulpian's statement⁶ that false coiners were condemned to the beasts, applies only to the very dregs of the people, persons of birth and distinction being punished by the confiscation of their estates and perpetual banishment. In the time of Constantine this crime had so increased, that the emperor resolved to exterminate the offenders; he published a law, A. D. 319, wherein he ordains, that any magistrate found guilty of the crime of false coining shall be banished to one of the remotest towns of the empire, and reserves to himself the power of confiscating his estate. A person of the humblest class of citizens was sentenced to perpetual exile, and his effects confiscated; and the slave was condemned to death. No punishment was awarded to persons of rank!

⁴ Cod. Theodos. leg. 2. De Falsa Moneta.

⁵ Idem. leg. 6. De Indulg. Criminum.

⁶ "Quicumque numos aureos raserint, tinxerint, finxerit, siquidem sint liberi, ad bestias dentur, si servi, summo supplicio adficiantur."

This law was insufficient to check the evil, and, two years afterwards, another was enacted, condemning persons of every class to death. It was renewed A.D. 326, and confiscation of estate was added to the penalty of death. The kind of death is, however, not described, these laws having relation solely to the forgers of silver. Those who counterfeited or clipped gold⁷ were adjudged to be burnt by the law above-mentioned, which was enacted A.D. 317.

In the Anglo-Saxon times, the laws of Athelstan declare, that a man accused of false coining shall go to the three-fold ordeal, and, if guilty, suffer death.⁸ And, in another place, moneymen who illegally work in a wood or elsewhere, shall forfeit their lives, unless pardoned by the king.⁹ By the laws of Æthelstan, he who counterfeited the coin was adjudged to lose the hand wherewith he committed the crime.¹⁰

The laws of Canute, though they deprecate sanguinary punishments in general, doom the forger to lose both hands, which are not to be ransomed either with gold or silver.¹¹

How far these severe enactments tended to check the

⁷ *Siquis solidi circulum circumciderit.*—Cod. Theod. See Beauvais.

⁸ *And ælc mýntere þe man tihð þ̅ falg feoh gloze gýppan hit forþoben pæg gange to þrimfealdan orþale. gif he fül beo flea hine man.*—Ancient Laws and Institutes of England, edited by Thorpe, Vol. I. p. 296.

⁹ *And þa mýntereþ þe inne pudu pýnceð ofþe elleghpær. þ̅ þa bion heora feoreþ fcylibiz.*—Ibid. p. 298.

¹⁰ *And gif ge mýntereþ fül purðe. flea man of þa hand þe he þ̅ fül mið porhte. 7 fette uppon þa mýnet-fwiððan.*—Ibid. p. 206.

¹¹ *7 gefe ofen þir falg pýnce þolize þærá handa þe he falg mið porhte 7 he hi mið nanum þingum ne geþicge. ne mið zolbe ne mið jeolþne.*—Ibid. p. 380.

practices of the forger in the days of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers, we have no means of judging; but we have good evidence that, under the Norman rule, the crime of forging increased to such a degree, that, at a grand council of the nation, assembled at London by Henry the First, A.D. 1105, it was deemed necessary to add to the loss of the guilty hand other horrible mutilations, namely, deprivation of sight and emasculation.¹² Ruding, after remarking on the commentaries of Fleta, says, that the crime of forging appears to have been treason by the common law, but was not declared to be so by any statute until the 25th of Edward III., by which, the counterfeiting of the king's coin, or the bringing into the realm counterfeit money to the likeness of the authorised currency, were made treason. Sir Edward Coke says, "It is to be known, that if any do counterfeit the king's coin, contrary to this statute of 25 Edward III., he shall have punishment of his body, but as in case of petit treason, that is, to be drawn and hanged till he be dead; but the forfeiture of his hands is as in other cases of high treason, for this statute is but a declaration of the common law; and the reason of his corporal punishment is, for that in this case he was only drawn and hanged at the common law, but a woman in that case was to be burnt." He then refers to the case of the Abbot of Missenden, in the county of Buckingham, who, for counterfeiting the king's money, was condemned to be drawn and hanged, but not quartered.

It would be tedious to recite the various laws enacted by the Roman emperors against forging, especially as it has been already done by Beauvais. These laws are sufficient to shew, that under the emperors the crime had

¹² Knighton, Brompton, Henry of Huntingdon, Hoveden, &c.

increased to an alarming extent. Of this, however, we have the best evidence in the cabinets of our collectors. Ancient forgeries of the coins of Ægina, of the far famed Darics, of the Consular series, and the extensive list of the emperors, attest the cunning and the ingenuity of the dishonest of past ages. Of those cities of antiquity in which luxury is known to have prevailed, we have numerous examples of false coins; but I shall here read to you a letter on this subject from a gentleman, well known for his intimate acquaintance with Greek numismatics. On my mentioning to Mr. Burgon that I was preparing a paper on the forgery of the public money, and soliciting information, he most promptly and kindly responded to my request, and at once communicated to me a letter, containing some most interesting particulars, which I shall read to you entire, in preference to engrafting it upon any observations of my own:—

Stoke Newington, April 19, 1843.

“ My dear Sir,

“ Your recollection of my having told you that I had seen many specimens of very early forgeries of Greek coins is quite correct. My impression is, that the art of the forger began to be exercised at the period of the beginning of coinage. I have, for instance, seen several forged specimens (from time to time) of the most rude and early coins of Ægina, which I think we may look upon as the earliest of the coins of Greece. If from that country we turn to the coins of Asia, I have also seen several examples of ancient forgeries of the most early coins of that quarter of the globe, namely, those primitive Lydian coins, having on the obverse the forepart of a lion facing the forepart of a bull, and generally of very elongated

shape, with two unequal and rude indentations on the reverse.

“ But I think, on the whole, that, from what I have observed of ancient forgeries of the silver coins of Greece and Asia, the crime must have been far less prevalent in those countries than in Magna Græcia. Forgeries of coins of Athens, for instance, are comparatively rare; as well as of Thebes, Corinth, Sicyon, Argos, &c., of which places, however, the coins are abundant and common. The same remark will apply to the coins of Alexander the Great, which were struck in such abundance, as to form a large portion of the currency of all Asia Minor, from the time of his death to the period of Augustus. Yet plated coins of Alexander are comparatively rare.

“ I must not, however, omit to notice, that although the regal coins of Macedon, and also those of Syria, generally speaking, offer few forgeries, there is a most remarkable, and indeed I may say, a most surprising exception to be noted in the Macedonian series, in the coins of Amyntas the Second. These coins present a question of very difficult solution, being *almost all plated*, or (as I consider them), ancient forgeries. How far the government of this king may have connived at the fraud, it is now impossible to say. The fact, however, is so: and to such an extent, that I almost doubt if ever I saw a coin of this king, of pure silver; those which appear so, when submitted to the test of the hydrostatic balance, being proved to be short of the specific gravity of pure silver. The result of my experiments in this way having led me to the conclusion, that coins, the specific gravity of which falls under 9·000, are plated coins. The specific gravity of genuine Greek coins, of silver, being very seldom under 10·000—but pardon this digression.

“ To return to the question of ancient forgeries, I have uniformly noticed them to be most abundantly found to belong to the most luxurious, populous, and wealthy cities of Magna Græcia; such, in particular, as Tarentum, Metapontum, and Thurium. I need not remind you, that the inhabitants of this last city had the Sybarites for ancestors, whose extravagance and luxury passed into a proverb. Nor is it surprising that the luxury and vice of those celebrated cities should have led to crime; and among crimes, to the forging of money, as furnishing the means for the more easy gratification of those sensual indulgences, which were universally enjoyed by the rich in those dissipated and wealthy cities. Many of the coins of the places in question having been originally very thickly coated, or *cased* with silver (called by the French, *fouurrées*), pass even now among collectors without suspicion. The full weight of such coins as those I am more particularly alluding to, being *about* 120 grains troy, they will generally be found to be ancient forgeries if they (being well preserved) only weigh 100 grains or under. And the specific gravity instrument will immediately prove this. I have used for the last twenty years a very useful one, manufactured by Mr. Bate, in the Poultry, and I believe invented or improved by him. It is not only infinitely less expensive, but more handy and useful for all common practical purposes, than the hydrostatic balance, and goes to a great degree of accuracy if carefully used, and proper attention paid to the *cleanness* of the coin, as well as to the temperature of the air and water while in use.

“ On referring to a common-place book, I find the following memoranda on this subject, which I made above twenty years ago, and if they interest you with respect to your intended paper on false coins, pray use them as

you may find suitable, as well as any part, or the whole, of this long epistle.

	Specific Gravity.
An English shilling	10·247
Primitive Lydian coin, lion and bull facing }	10·212
Another, but an old forgery	7·926 thickly plated.
Tetradrachm of Nicomedes	10·070
Coin of Maussolus	10·328
Another	10·322
Another	10·479
Pixodarus (now in Brit. Mus.)	10·867
Another primitive Lydian, lion and bull facing }	10·025
Another	9·938
Another	10·425
Another	10·402

These differences shew, that the art of refining was ill understood, or not practised, when these last four very early coins were struck.

	Specific Gravity.
Coin of Thurium	10 277
—— Neapolis (Campaniæ)	9·675
—— Macedon. <i>Obv.</i> buckler, } <i>Rev.</i> prow of galley }	10·441
Another	10·166
Another	8·454
Another	10·218
Another	10·344
Another	10·128
Another	10·468
Another	10·242
Another	9·655
Another	10·243

so that, as I said before, coins *may be* of silver, a little under 10·000, but under 9·000 will probably always be found to be ancient forgeries, when they belong to cities not in the habit of coining *base silver*. I may also add a concluding remark, not to the honour of the cities before

named, of Magna Græcia, that the style of art on these false coins being of the fine period, one is reluctantly led to infer, that during the most flourishing and glorious epochs of their history, public morals were not at all improved or benefited. With much regard, believe me,

“ Dear Sir,

“ Yours very truly,

“ THOMAS BURGON.

“ P.S.—The process used by the forgers of these coins will not have escaped your observation. It must have been as follows. The piece of copper intended to be struck, was submitted to a preliminary adjustment as to size and shape, and then was *most thickly plated* by the common process. The piece being then ready for striking, was struck by the usual process, *as if it had been of pure silver*. The irregularity (or rather the difference) in the expansive powers of the two metals during the operation of striking, was compensated for, or overcome, by the thickness of the coating of silver, which though it some times cracked and burst, was generally sufficiently ductile to conceal the copper effectually.

“ J. Y. AKERMAN, Esq.”

Without remarking on the obvious value of the information which this letter gives us regarding the practices of the Greek falsarii, I proceed to notice the works of Roman forgers.

Pliny informs us, that in his time, the forged denarius, plated with silver, was considered a curiosity, and purchased at the price of several genuine pieces.¹³ It is

¹³ Falsi denarii spectatur exemplar; pluribusque veris denariis adulterinus emitur.—*Hist. Nat.* lib. xxxviii. c. 47.

difficult to reconcile this with the fact, that false denarii must have abounded at the period in which he wrote. Plated coins of the emperor Claudius occur so frequently, that in forming a series of imperial denarii, a denarius of silver is not very easily obtained, four in every five being plated; a circumstance which warrants a suspicion that Claudius, or his mint-master, were the forgers. It is the same with the coins of Pausanias, king of Macedonia, which are invariably found to be of copper, plated with silver. Indeed, Mr. Borrell, of Smyrna, cites a specimen of good silver, in his cabinet, as something remarkable.¹⁴ M. de Cadalvene, remarking on this very coin, observes, that notwithstanding the number of plated coins of Pausanias, it cannot be supposed that they were all executed by forgers, as some numismatists have advanced. "On ne saurait raisonnablement supposer," observes he, "qu'elles aient été fabriquées en si grande quantité que celles-la seules soient restées, et encore moins que le hazard seul n'eut conservé que celles-la."

In addition to the remarkable circumstance, that so many of the denarii of Claudius are discovered to be plated, and in support of the opinion, which has been entertained, that this emperor permitted such a coinage to take place in his mint, we have the direct testimony of two historians, that such frauds were sometimes practised by the emperors. Suetonius acquaints us, that Julius Cæsar, in time of necessity, took from the treasury of the Capitol three thousand pounds weight of gold, and substituted the same quantity of gilded brass;¹⁵ and in later times, as we are informed by Dion Cassius, Caracalla

¹⁴ Num. Chron. Vol. III. p. 141.

¹⁵ In primo consulatu tria millia pondo auri furatus e capitolio; tantundem inaurati æris reposuit. In Cæs. c. 54.

issued pieces of lead gilt with gold, and copper plated with silver.¹⁶

The existence of such vast numbers of plated coins has been accounted for in various ways. Some have supposed that they escaped the crucible in ancient times, in consequence of their being discovered to be plated; but this can hardly be admitted, as there is good reason to believe, that in those days it was extremely difficult to detect them. Thus Petronius¹⁷ speaks of two most difficult arts; that of the physician, who had to prescribe for internal diseases, and that of the nummularius, whose province it was to detect the brass in a false coin—*per argentum æs videt*. The Roman denarii were too thick to allow of the modern test by ringing, and nothing but the file would enable the receiver of spurious coin to detect its quality. Tacitus says of the Germans, “*Pecuniam probant veterem et diu notam, serratos bigatosque;*”¹⁸ i. e. they preferred the oldest denarii which had the biga type, and were notched round the edges.¹⁹ The barbarians were, however, no match for civilised duplicity. The Roman forgers soon supplied them with spurious denarii carefully notched, and afterwards plated. Even of these serrated forgeries specimens still exist. Pliny informs us, that the soldiers of Antony mutinied, because he had mixed iron with the denarii;²⁰ and Pinkerton refers to a denarius of

¹⁶ Lib. lxxvii. c. 14.

¹⁷ S. 56.

¹⁸ De Morib. Germ. cap. v. Modern forgers have sometimes notched their spurious pieces before washing or plating them.

¹⁹ There were other reasons for this preference. The denarii of the time of Tacitus weigh on the average 52 grains; those of ancient fabric 60.

²⁰ Muscuit denario Triumvir Antonius ferrum.—Lib. xxxiii. 9. The words which follow:—“*Miscuit æri falsæ monetæ,*” are further proof of the use of brass in false coins.

the triumvir, which flew to the magnet like iron.²¹ The coin in question was shewn to me by the possessor, the late Mr. Douce, who informed me that he had communicated it to Pinkerton. This piece is doubtless now in the Bodleian Library, with the other coins of Mr. Douce. It is of the LEG. VI. Thus far the account of Pliny is corroborated; but I think it right to mention, that I have examined, and tried with the magnet, many hundreds of the legionary denarii of Antony, without discovering a second example containing iron. The metal generally used as the *anima* of a false coin was copper, the oxide of which may sometimes be seen cropping out through the coating of silver. Nevertheless, it is evident that iron was sometimes used, even at a later period, since Frölich mentions two ancient forgeries of denarii of Severus in that metal.²²

In the reign of Severus there were important alterations in the standard or quality of the authorised coins; and of these alterations the forgers of the period appear to have taken advantage.²³ Hitherto the forger *plated* his spurious coins: but when the public money was considerably debased, the same degree of skill was no longer necessary; and he who could form a mould, could with

²¹ Essay on Medals, vol. i. p. 43.

²² Quatuor Tent. p. 364. We learn, however, from Petronius, in the passage above quoted, that brass or copper were generally used in the fabrication of false coins.

²³ The assay of Roman Denarii prefixed to my Descript. Catalogue of Roman Coins, shews that long previous to this reign the silver was much reduced; and Plautus, who died more than a century and a half B.C., seems to hint, in the prologue to his *Casina*, that even in those early days, the quality of Roman silver was already reduced below its primitive standard.

Nam nunc novæ, quæ prodeunt, Comediæ,
Multo sunt nequiores, quam nummi novi.

facility create a spurious coin, the quality of which could only be detected by assay, a process which in those days must have been but imperfectly known.

Apuleius, who flourished in the reigns of the Antonines, shews that in those days false coins abounded, and that it was necessary to submit sums of money to be examined by the *nummularius* or changer, in order that their genuineness might be tested.

Now, at the time in question, the public money must have been issued at a certain standard, which, although not so high as that of former reigns, was nevertheless uniform and unvaried; but, in subsequent reigns, and especially in those of Severus and his sons, when more serious reductions in the silver coin were effected, the forgers could put in circulation an abundance of false money without fear of detection; for we have no evidence, that, on the issue of a new coinage, the standard or quality was proclaimed by public authority; so that, unless the forger overreached himself by making the spurious coins of too low a standard, he might issue them with impunity.

Neumann has taken the trouble to give a catalogue of false or plated coins in the cabinet of Vienna.²⁴ It would not be a difficult task to swell this list considerably, and indeed to refer to examples of base money of almost every consular family, and throughout the long list of the emperors. There are some specimens, however, which occur so frequently, that either the forgers enjoyed great license at the time the genuine coins were in circulation, or the particular type could be more successfully imitated than others. Without noticing all the types which occur on plated coins of the imperial series, I will mention one with

²⁴ Roman Num. Anecdoti, Vol. II. p. 202.

which every member of the Numismatic Society must be acquainted; I allude to that denarius of Augustus, which represents on the reverse Caius and Lucius standing with the sacred shields. *All* the coins of this type appear to be plated. Indeed, as before mentioned, plated coins of Claudius and of Domitilla are so frequent, and so much exceed the number which are found of good metal throughout, that it may be conjectured either Claudius, or his officers of the mint, were the forgers. Indeed, there can be but little doubt that spurious coins were issued from the public mints, whenever the necessities of the state were pressing. The rapacity, luxury, and prodigality of many of the Roman emperors, and their immense military establishments, must have occasionally involved them in great difficulties, and led to results similar to those which have stamped with everlasting infamy the reign of our eighth Henry, the first English monarch who debased the public money.

The severe punishments of the middle ages were insufficient to check the crime of forging, which appears to have been almost exclusively practised by the Jews and the ecclesiastics.²⁵ The more frequent crime, however, of the former, was clipping and filing, while the manufactory of base coin went on undisturbed in the solitude of the cloister. This is not mere conjecture, as will be shewn hereafter.

It is quite clear, that at this period, while the church was thundering her anathemas against the forgers of the public money, many of her sons were busily engaged in its

²⁵ Sometimes the moneyers themselves were busy. In 1118, according to Prynne, Algar and Sprackeling were fined ten marks of silver, to be quit of a plea, or accusation, of having coined false money. Seven years afterwards, ninety-four moneyers underwent the horrible punishment of the time.

fabrication. In the year 1123, the crime had increased so much, that forgers and circulators of base coin were declared by the council of Lateran to be "accursed, oppressors of the poor, disturbers of the state, and excommunicated."²⁶

On the accession of Henry II., the money was found in so wretched a state, that a new coinage was deemed absolutely necessary. Hollingshed says, that this king caused a stop to the circulation of certain pieces termed "Basels," doubtless some continental coins of inferior value and standard to the English penny struck at Basle, brought in by foreigners. Some of the moneyers, it is said, were at this time mutilated and fined for malpractices. Besides other punishments, they were bound two and two, and carried in carts to the king's court.²⁷

In the twelfth century, the money-changers of the continent reaped a plentiful harvest, by selecting the Poitevine money from that of the Tournois standard, to which it was superior. Monsieur Lecointre-Dupont, an able French numismatist, says of the Poitevine coins, "Leur retrait paraît avoir été complet dès 1215, puisqu'on ne les retrouve plus mentionnées dans les chartes du pays."²⁸ The number of false pieces, observes this writer, coined in imitation of the Poitevine money, led to the name of *Pictavinator*, which was given to forgers and clippers of the public money, as appears by these lines in Ducange:—²⁹

²⁶ By the Council of Tours, held in 1583, all who had received false money, or that which might be suspected as such, were forbidden to circulate it, although they were not concerned in the fabrication of it, and were even ignorant of the person by whom it was counterfeited. Ruding, from the *Notitia Ecclesiastica*, pp. 413, 659.

²⁷ Ruding, sub anno 1159.

²⁸ *Revue Numismatique An.* 1838.

²⁹ Voce *Pictavina*.

“ Et si est fausse serrurière,
 Et une fausse monnoière,
 Et une *Poitevineresse*,
 Et de deniers mesconteresse.”

An ancient author says, that in the time of Stephen, every man debased the coins at his pleasure.³⁰ The rarity of this king's money would render expensive any experiments on its fineness; but it is extremely probable that many pieces would be found to be much alloyed. Their execution is notoriously rude and imperfect, and some of them may be the work of forgers.

In the eighth year of Richard I., among other items in an account rendered by the chamberlain of London, is “sixteen shillings ten pence, the chattells of certain clippers.”

In the reign of John, inquiry was directed to be made throughout the realm for clippers of the coin; and it was commanded, that the offending parties should be committed to prison, and their goods seized. The author of the *Annals of Waverly* relates a curious anecdote of this king when at Northampton in 1212. It appears that John, in the hope of intimidating the Pope's nuncios, who had then pronounced sentence of excommunication against him, caused the sheriff to bring before him all prisoners in his custody, whom he condemned to most cruel mutilations. Among these unfortunate wretches was a priest who had been detected in counterfeiting the coin, and whom the king ordered to be hanged forthwith. Pandulph, one of the nuncios, on hearing this, threatened those who should touch the ecclesiastic with excommunication, and went out to procure a candle for that purpose. John, alarmed at the threat, followed Pandulph, and delivered the priest into his hands, that he might do justice upon him, but the nuncio set him at liberty.³¹

³⁰ Simon Dunelm.

³¹ *Ibid.* vol. I. p. 180.

In the sixth year of Henry III., the bailiffs of the Cinque Ports of Yarmouth and Dunwich were commanded by writ to inquire concerning falsifiers and clippers of the coin. One of the proclamations in this reign commands, that no clipped money shall be current; and that if any for the future shall be found, it should be bored through and returned to the owner. In the year 1270 (his fifty-fourth year), Henry ordered a general proof and assay of the coins to be made throughout the kingdom, a fact sufficient to shew, that at this period much false money was in circulation. This order does not appear to have had the desired effect; for, on the accession of Edward I., multitudes of Jews, as well as Christians, suffered the severe punishment of the time. The chroniclers, Harding and Langtoft, allude to these punishments, which, however, were insufficient to check the evil. The introduction of foreign coin was also as frequent as ever, and the temptation to profit by this means appears to have been too great for human cupidity. Among these were pieces popularly termed pollards and crockards, scaldings, brabants, eagles, leonines, sleepings, &c.

It has been seen, that the purity of the English penny led to its imitation by forgers at home, and by the municipal authorities and princes of the continent.³² It was the same with those elegant gold coins called florens, from the city of Florence, in which they were first struck.³³ These pieces were said to be twenty-four carats fine, and the temptation to forge them of inferior standard was too great to be resisted. Giovanni Villani relates, that the crime of forging had increased to such an extent in the

³² See examples of this money in Snelling on the Counterfeit Sterlings. 4to.

³³ According to Giovanni Villani, A. D. 1252.

Pontificate of John XXII., that his Holiness, alarmed at the progress of so great an evil, made a grand procession, in the course of which he excommunicated those who had struck florens of inferior standard.³⁴ Among the forgers of this period was Adamo of Brescia, who, at the instigation of Guido, Alessandro, and Aghinulfo, lords of Romena, forged florens of three carats of alloy. He thus speaks in Dante :—

“ Ivi é Romena, la dov'io falsai
 La lega suggellata del Batista,
 Perch'io il corpo suso arso lasciai.”³⁵

And afterwards :—

“ Io son per lor tra si fatta famiglia :
 Ei m' indussero a battere i fiorini,
 Ch' avevan tre carati di mondiglia.”³⁶

By the statute of Frankpledge, made in the eighteenth year of Edward II. (A.D. 1325), jurors were required by their oath to report to the king concerning all clipping and coining which might come to their knowledge. But the laws against the forgery of the coin appear to have been feebly enforced by this unfortunate king; since his son and successor, on coming to the throne, found it necessary to issue proclamations for the correction of the currency : for

³⁴ “ Il Papa (Giovanni XXII.) fece grandi processi, e scomunica contro chi facesse battere, o batessi Fiorini d'oro contrafatti e falsi alla forma di quei di Firenze.”

³⁵ Dell' Inferno, Cant. XXX. l. 73. Thus aptly rendered by Cary :—

“ There is Romena, where I falsified
 The metal with the Baptist's form impressed,
 For which on earth I left my body burnt !”

The law of Constantine the Great, adjudging forgers to be burnt, would appear by this to have been transmitted to the Italians. Even in England, up to a late period, women were burnt for forging.

³⁶ Line 88. “ ————— they brought me down
 Among this tribe : induced by them I stamped
 The florens with three carats of alloy.”

Edward III., in his first year, while the queen-mother yet retained her power, directed that the treasurer and barons of the Exchequer should make strict inquiry after counterfeit and light money, said to have been brought into England by natives as well as foreigners. All manner of black money was decried, and was not on any account to be current one month after the proclamation.

Ruding³⁷ gives an account of a curious fraud practised at this time by Salamon de Ripple, a monk of the abbey of St. Augustin, in Canterbury, a receiver of the tenths and fifteenths in that diocese, as deputy for the abbot. The cunning father made a balance which he called a penny pise, and selecting twenty shillings in old heavy pennies, he weighed the money which he received against them, so that those who thought to pay twenty shillings, were forced to pay from three to five shillings more. Though this piece of knavery was performed without the knowledge of the abbot, he was nevertheless adjudged to pay a fine of eighty pounds, and to refund the money which his deputy had unjustly taken. This appears to have been a very frequent practice in the middle ages, as we learn from *Piers Plowman*. Coveitise says, among other rogueries,

“ ——— in my youthe,
I lerned among Lombardes
And Jewes a lesson,
To weye pens with a peis,
And pare the hevyste,
And lene it for love of the cros.”³⁸

It may be readily imagined, that if such frauds were frequent in the middle ages, they were still more common in earlier times.

³⁷ *Annals*, vol. i., p. 211.

³⁸ *The Vision and Creed of Piers Plowman*, vol. i. p. 91, line 2954. A very elegant edition of this remarkable poem, edited by Mr. Wright, has just been published by Pickering.

In 1339, black money, called "turneys" (Tournois), is said to have been made in Ireland; and its circulation was by proclamation prohibited, upon pain of forfeiture of money and goods. Subsequently, however, it was found that great inconvenience had arisen in consequence of the prohibition, on account of the scarcity of sterling money; and then another proclamation was issued, which stated, that if the currency of these coins was found more convenient, it should be continued until other money was provided! Two years afterwards, the mayor and bailiffs of Dover were ordered to make proclamation for the better observance of the statute respecting black money³⁹. As this writ was directed to the authorities of that port only, Ruding supposes that some large importation had been made there about that time.

In 1342 and 1343, so much light money had been introduced into the Channel Islands, that the government receivers were commanded to receive good coin only.

In 1346, the Commons of England petitioned against the introduction of the continental coins termed *Lusshebourne* pieces, which might be readily mistaken for genuine coins. Chaucer's monk says:—

" This maketh that our wives wol assaye
Religious folk, for they moun better paye
Of Venus payementes than mowen we :
God wote, no Lussheburghes payen ye."⁴⁰

While honest Piers Plowman sings:—

" As in Lussheburwes is a luther alay
And yet loketh he lik a sterlyng,
The merk of that monee is good,
Ac the metal is feble."

³⁹ Ruding, vol. i. p. 213.

⁴⁰ Prologue to the Monk's Tale. These pieces were struck at Luxemburg. Specimens may be seen in the *Blätter für Münzkunde* for 1839, p. 94.

Notwithstanding this petition, which was received with every attention, the complaint was renewed the following year. It is said, that at this period several merchants suffered the extreme penalty of the law for offences against the coin.

In the reign of Richard II., who ascended the throne in 1377, the complaints against clipping and false coining were renewed. Hearne, in his Preface to Hemingford, lays this crime on the Wiclifites.⁴¹

But it would be tedious to recount all the complaints and petitions made by the English people in the middle ages against forging, clipping, the introduction of light foreign coins, and the circulating of what was termed "black money."

I cannot forbear to notice a criminal of rank in this century. Jeanne de Boulogne, countess of Boulogne and Auvergne, was convicted of the crime of forging in the year 1422, having made in caves and secret places of her chateau of St. Supplice, in the diocese of Toulouse, false money bearing the royal name, but of inferior value, standard, and weight.⁴²

About the year 1447, there were complaints of clipped and counterfeit coin in Ireland, and of the circulation of spurious coin called "O'Reyley's money."⁴³

By the statute of Henry VII., A.D. 1487, it was made treason to counterfeit the foreign coins of gold or silver permitted to be current in England, many persons having been guilty of this crime, because they were aware that the forging of such coins was neither treason nor felony.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ruding, sub anno 1379.

⁴² Observations sur les Monnaies de Boulogne, etc. Par A. F. Dufaitelle, 8vo., p. 16.

⁴³ Simon's Essay, App. No. III.

⁴⁴ Ruding, vol. i., p. 294.

Fabian informs us, that in the year 1505, a money-taker, one of the coiners of the Tower, was drawn and hanged at Tyburn. The same chronicler, under the 37th year of Henry VIII., says, "This yere, in Februarie, should a woman haue been brent in Smithfield for clipping of gold, but the kynges pardon came, she beyng at the stake redy to be brente."

About the year 1507, the infamous agents of the royal miser, Henry VII., prosecuted Sir William Capel, some time lord mayor of London, for remissness in not punishing some false coiners, for which pretended crime he was fined two thousand pounds. Protesting against this injustice, he broke out into violent abuse of the ministers; and, refusing to pay the fine, was committed to the Tower, where he continued in custody during the life of the king.⁴⁵

Gerard Maylines, in his "Maintenance of Free Trade," says, Henry VIII. "granted letters patent to divers of his nobles to make base monies of their own plate," &c., an assertion, for the truth of which he quotes no authority.

I pass over the base coinage, by *authority*, of the reigns of Henry VIII., and his son and successor, a subject so well known, and upon which so much has been said and written. In the reign of the latter monarch (A.D. 1548), Sir William Sharrington confessed to his having counterfeited, in the mint at Bristol, "twelve thousand pounds of coins," resembling the testoons of the time, besides other malpractices, such as falsifying his accounts, and clipping and shearing. It is alleged against the king's uncle, Sir Thomas Seymour, that these extensive forgeries were undertaken by Sharrington, to aid that personage in his traitorous designs. Many interesting particulars, relative

⁴⁵ Stow, Ann. Engl.

to this extraordinary forgery, will be found in Ruding's Annals.⁴⁶

In 1548, a proclamation was issued, in which it is stated, that the testoons, groats, and other coins had been counterfeited "beyond the seas," and "privily brought into the realm."

In 1568, according to the chroniclers, Philip Mestrelle was hung and quartered at Tyburn for coining gold. At the same time, two Englishmen suffered for offences against the coin. One of them had been found guilty of clipping silver; the other had struck testoons in *tin*.

In 1577, Richard Robinson, a goldsmith, was hanged at Tyburn for clipping gold; and about the same period, John de Ley, a Frenchman, and five English gentlemen, were found guilty of counterfeiting, and suffered at Norwich the extreme penalty. Hollingshed speaks of a very daring forger in Ireland, named Orwarke, in the following year, who maintained a number of false coiners.

From a letter addressed by Richard Martyn, warden of the Mint, to the lord treasurer, Burleigh, in the year 1580, it appears that the coins of the realm, besides those which were permitted to be current, were forged. Bull, a moneyer of the Mint, and one Alsope, were detected making false angels, of sixty shillings the ounce. Eight persons were apprehended for counterfeiting foreign money.

1586. In this year there was an Irish statute against forging and counterfeiting foreign coins. It was a copy of the 14th Elizabeth, chap. iii.

There was a piece of roguery common in the days of Elizabeth, which may be noticed here. The half-shilling, quarter-shilling, and three-halfpenny, and three-farthing

⁴⁶ Vol. i., p. 314.

pieces, were distinguished from the groat and penny, by the full-blown rose behind the queen's bust. It was a practice to erase this rose, so as to make the piece resemble one of higher value. In Beaumont and Fletcher's *Scornful Lady*, Lovelass says of Morecraft, the miser,

" He had a bastard, his own toward issue,
Whipped and then cropped, for *washing out the roses*
In three farthings to make them pence."

Martin Folkes says he had once seen a groat, on which some knave had stamped a rose, to make it look like a sixpence!

In the *Public Intelligencer*, October 22 to 29, 1655, is an advertisement concerning one Abraham Stapley, a forger, who appears to have been a fellow of some skill, and to have engraved dies. It states, that "this Abraham Stapley is a false coiner of money; for in his house at Deptford were found several false coining irons for half-crowns, and false half-crowns coined with the date of 1655. And this is to give notice to all persons whatsoever, that shall receive any of the said money of Stapley's, dated 1655: there being none of that date in his highness' mint coined to this day, the 26th of October."⁴⁷ I have never seen a forged piece with the date 1655.

Having thus brought to your notice some of the principal facts connected with the practices of forgers in past times, I shall reserve my remarks on the false coining of our own days for some future opportunity, and conclude with exhibiting to you a few specimens of this nefarious art.

⁴⁷ See a Letter of Sir H. Ellis to the President of the Numismatic Society. *Numismatic Journal*, Vol. I. p. 274.

- No. 1. Is a coin of Velia, in Campania, of a well known type. This piece is thickly plated with silver, and is a fair specimen of the work of the Greek forgers.
2. Is a Denarius of the consular family Porcia, plated on copper, precisely in the same manner as the former coin.
3. Is a Denarius of the Emperor Claudius. R. A triumphal arch, with the inscription DE BRITANNIS. This also is plated on copper.
4. An ancient British coin of copper, similar to that engraved in Ruding, Plate III, Nos. 44 and 52, thickly plated with silver. It is probable that other coins of this type will, on examination, be found to be plated. The Gauls, as we learn from Pliny (Hist. Nat. l. xxxiv. c. 17), were very skilful in the art of plating; and the Britons would appear to have learnt it from their more civilized neighbours, of whose plated coins I have seen many specimens.
5. Is an imitation of the aureus of the emperor Tiberius Constantine; copper, washed with gold. I have seen a copper coin of the emperor Probus, which has been similarly disguised.
- 6, 7. Are very remarkable examples of spurious coins. One is an imitation of a half-crown of Charles I.; the other of "the Ormond crown." Specimens of forged coins of Charles I. are not uncommon; and those of the Ormond Crown are not very rare. That forged money of Charles I. should occur is by no means surprising, when we consider the circumstances under which large quantities of his coins were struck;^{4b} but how are we to account for the existence of forged examples of pieces rudely and hastily coined during a time of siege, when life and property were not safe for a single hour, and when it is scarcely possible to conceive the forger could have found a hiding-place in which to ply his infamous craft? The subject is so perplexing, that I leave it to the more experienced for explanation. Both these pieces are plated on copper, precisely in the manner of the ancient forged coins.

^{4b} It is mentioned, to the honour of this king, that in the most pressing exigencies of his times, he never resorted to the expedient of debasing the coin. This contrasts strongly with the conduct of James II., who obliged the Irish people to receive coins struck in brass, with their fictitious value in pence stamped upon them, i. e. VI., XII., XXX.

8. A false shilling of the Commonwealth, date 1658, struck in base metal, evidently from a die prepared by the forger himself. Could this, though not of the date previously alluded to, be one of the efforts of Stapley ?
9. Is a Spanish dollar, with about a hundred "chops" upon it; and which has evidently circulated extensively for some years among the Chinese, who never suspected that it was copper plated with silver.
10. May be paralleled with the former. It is an imitation in brass of a Spanish dollar, with the countermark of the head of George III. It is well known that the Spanish dollars were thus stamped, in England, on the neck of the bust, in the year 1797; and that they were immediately afterwards counterfeited in such numbers, that it led to the stamping of bank dollars.
11. Is a rupee of the East India Company; and though the stamp is that of the authorised die, and the piece is not, strictly speaking, a forgery, it yet served the purposes of a false coin, a hole having been drilled in the side, and the piece being completely hollowed, and then filled up with lead. This, I am informed, is a very common practice in the East Indies, and would, I doubt not, be much too tedious for dishonest Europeans.
- 12, 13. Are specimens of false dollars, on which I may hereafter, with your permission, venture to remark, when I notice some of the efforts of our modern *falsarii*.







