

XXVII—*Various Communications to the Society, of a Miscellaneous Nature, selected from the Unpublished Papers in the Society's possession.*

I.—*Notice of the two Roman Sculptured Heads, preserved in the front of a house at the Netherbow, Edinburgh. Accompanied with a plate, engraved by DAVID ALLAN, 1783.*

[Read to the Society, 24th January 1831.]

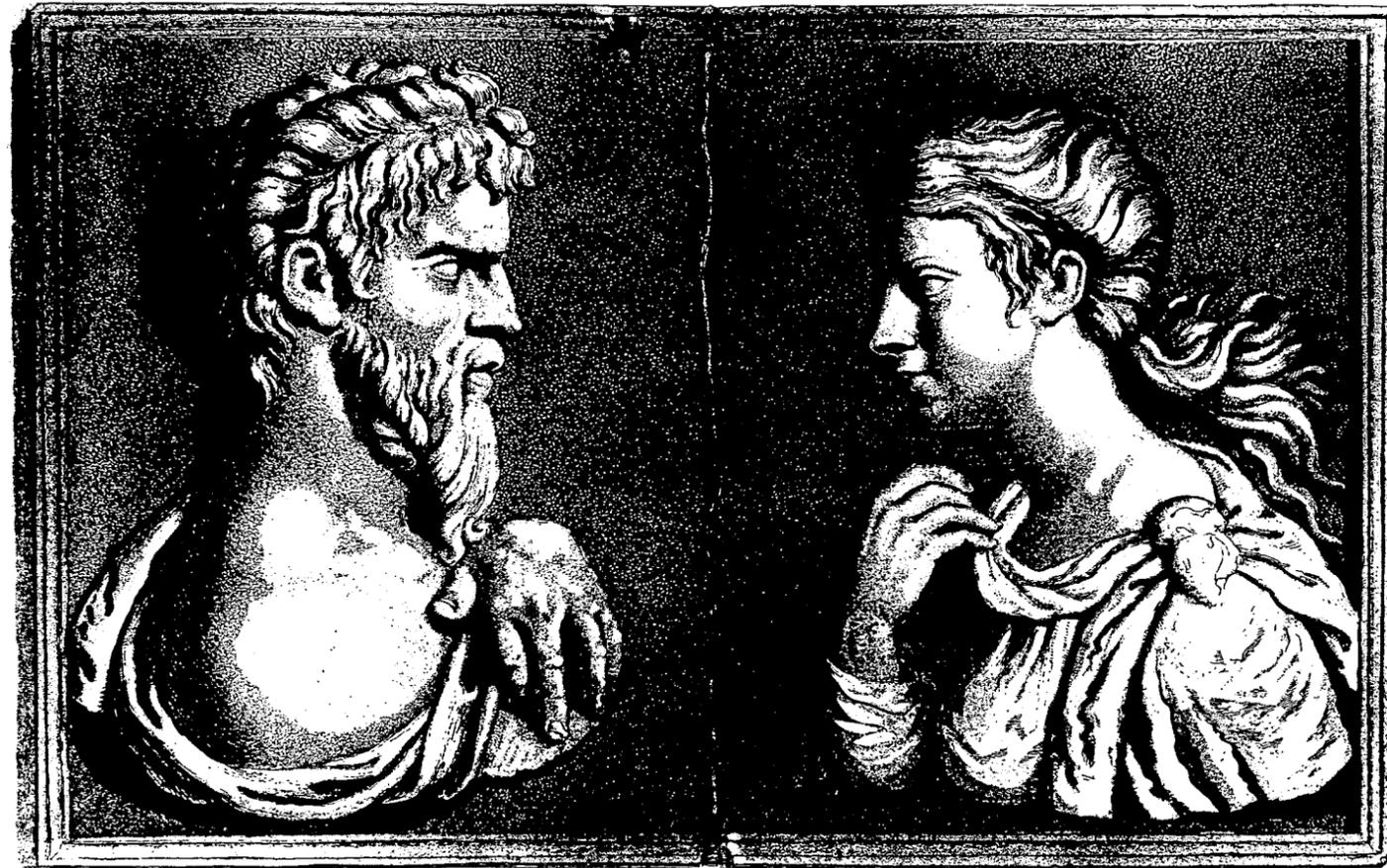
THE piece of Roman Sculpture, containing two fine Profile Heads in high relief, preserved in the front of a house on the south side of the High Street, at the Netherbow, has long been pointed out to strangers as one of the curiosities of Edinburgh. It was probably with the intention of giving some account of it in the Transactions of the Society, that the accompanying etching in aquatint was made by the celebrated Scottish painter, David Allan, in the year 1783. This, as we are informed, was done at the suggestion, if not at the expence, of the late Earl of Buchan. As the copper-plate itself and a considerable number of impressions have remained in the Society's possession, it has been thought advisable to follow out the original intention by introducing it into the Transactions; and for this purpose some brief Notice of the Sculpture may be deemed requisite.

The earliest Writer we know of who makes mention of this sculptured stone, is Gordon, in his valuable work on Roman Antiquities, entitled '*Itinerarium Septentrionale*,' &c. 1727; where there is also given a small, but not well executed engraving, said to have been 'designed by the ingenious Mr Alexander of Edinburgh.'

'I have been lately favoured (says Gordon) with a draught of two very curious Heads, built up in a wall in Edinburgh, the sculpture of which is so excellent, that I have been advised by the best judges of antiquity to give it a place in my book. One head is the representation of a man with a beard, opposite to which is the other of a woman, both in *mezzo rilievo*: they are attired in Roman habits, and are indisputably works of that nation; notwithstanding it appears that the stone has been cut asunder in the middle, and a Gothick inscription, in the Monkish times, thrust in betwixt them. Some have imagined this to have been originally designed for a Sarcophagus; many Heads of the like kind appearing upon the Sarcophagi in Montfaucon, and other books of Antiquity; but a very learned and illustrious Antiquary here, by the ideas of the Heads, judges them to be representations of the Emperor SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS, and

VOL. III.

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‘ his wife JULIA. This is highly probable, and consistent with the Roman history ;
 ‘ for that the Emperor, and most of his august family, were in Scotland, appears plain in
 ‘ Xephiline, from Dio, as I have already mentioned in the 104th page of this work. The
 ‘ figures, as they were designed by the ingenious Mr Alexander, at Edinburgh, see in
 ‘ *Pl. 3, Fig. 1.*—(ITINER. SEPTENT. p. 186.)

There is a tradition, noticed by subsequent writers, that the Stone had been brought from a house on the North side of the High Street. The inscription, in Gothick characters, mentioned by Gordon as being inserted between the two Heads, is as follows, cut on a square stone or tablet, which was probably rescued from the ruins of some of the old monastic establishments in Edinburgh.

In sudore
 vultus tui
 vesceris pane
 tuo. G. 13.

This quotation from the malediction pronounced on our Primeval Parents, being naturally supposed to have some allusion to the two Heads, no doubt gave rise to the vulgar tradition that they were intended to represent Adam and Eve ; and likewise to the absurd story of the inscription having been put up by a baker, which, since the days of Maitland, the Historian of our City, has been constantly re-echoed by subsequent writers. His account, however, may be here quoted :—

‘ Just below, in the wall of a house, in *alto-relievo* and *profil*, are the Heads of a Man
 ‘ and Woman, by people said to be those of Adam and Eve, and to have been removed
 ‘ from the wall of a house on the northern side of the street : Be that as it will, the form
 ‘ of the table whereon the said busts were cut, is altered ; and, being halved, the heads
 ‘ are divided, and a stone fitted to the original border inserted, whereon are engraven the
 ‘ following words in Gothick characters, and not in Saxon, as generally asserted, *viz.*

‘ *In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane, anno 1621, (a)*

That is,

‘ *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,*

‘ which, being taken from the Scriptural history of Adam and Eve, have given occasion
 ‘ to think that they are the busts of those persons ; but that they are not, I shall endeavour to shew, I hope, to the satisfaction of the Reader.

‘ These stones being in a wall over a baker’s shop, I imagine they were put up by one

(a) Maitland and others have mistaken the words of the Inscription, which, as given above, has been copied from the original stone. The last line has always been wrong printed, as if it contained the date of the year 63 ;—whereas the last letters evidently present a contracted form of indicating that the words of the Inscription are taken from Genesis, chapter 3. They correspond exactly with the reading of the First Edition of the Bible, printed at Mentz about the year 1455.—A Cast of the Heads is in the Society’s Museum.

‘ of that profession, who, taking them to be the heads of the said Adam and Eve, added
 ‘ the above inscription, in some measure alluding to his trade ; but whoever at first con-
 ‘ ferred on them those names are greatly mistaken ; for Adam and Eve were both
 ‘ naked, other than their coats of skins, notwithstanding of which, they are both carved
 ‘ and painted naked ; whereas the said busts are clothed with the Roman *chlamis*, which,
 ‘ with their elegant sculpture, manifestly shews them to owe their origin to that nation.
 ‘ These figures, by Antiquaries, are taken to be those of the Emperor Severus and
 ‘ Julia his consort, by resembling the figures on their coins, more than of those of any
 ‘ other of the Imperial families.’—(HIST. EDIN. p. 169.)

It is only necessary to add, that the general resemblance of the heads to those on the coins of Severus and Julia may warrant the inference that has been drawn ; more particularly as the Romans were not much accustomed to represent ideal heads in their sculpture ; and the visit of the Empress to this distant corner of the Roman world was a circumstance of an unusual occurrence.

D. LAING.