

The Archaeological Journal.

DECEMBER, 1857.

NOTICE OF THE DARNLEY RING.

THE visit of our society in the summer of 1856 to the ancient Metropolis of North Britain, with the remarkable assemblage of historical relics brought together on that occasion in the spacious halls of the National Galleries, excited feelings of interest for which we were scarcely prepared. Few indeed can be insensible to the impression which many scenes and objects there presented to our view tended to produce. There were to be found, possibly, in those varied collections, to which the stores not only of ancient houses but of the numerous provincial museums in Scotland largely contributed, objects comparatively of trivial character, or even of questionable authenticity. The general impression, however, gave fresh proof of the value of those minor links of evidence, which enable us to realise historical associations, and serve to illustrate the progress of arts, the conditions of society and daily life, the growth of local industry, or the peculiarities of local usages.

Of the historical vestiges and Scottish antiquities of every period combined in the Museum of the Institute at Edinburgh, I hope hereafter to be able to complete the detailed notices which have been in preparation, and to include in that memorial the numerous relics connected with the royal race of Scotland, and especially with Mary Stuart, whose disastrous history was brought to so tragical a termination.¹

An object of very interesting character from its supposed

¹ The publication of a Catalogue of the Museum formed at the Edinburgh Meeting has been undertaken by Mr. Constable; and it is in the press. It will

form a volume very fully illustrated, to range with the Annual volumes and Journal of the Institute.

connexion with the history of Mary Stuart and her captivity at Fotheringay Castle, is the gold ring stated to have been found near that place. It had been brought under our notice at a previous occasion, and was unfortunately not attainable at the time of the Edinburgh meeting. This ring, formerly in the possession of Colonel Grant, was exhibited by Mr. Farrer, in the museum formed during the Annual Meeting of the Institute at Salisbury, July, 1849. It has subsequently been added to the choice collection of rings in the possession of Edmund Waterton, Esq., F.S.A., of Walton Hall, near Wakefield, who has formed with great taste a *dactylotheca* of remarkable character.

The beautiful ring discovered at Fotheringay, and here figured, has been regarded as a nuptial gift, a token probably of plighted troth, from Mary to Darnley. The impress, as will be seen by the woodcuts, presents the initials H. and M. combined; with a true-love knot repeated above and below the monogram. The first stroke of the H., however, has a transverse line at the top, forming a T., a letter which it is not



The Darnley Ring, found at Fotheringay. The Monogram, intended for use as a seal, here appears reversed.

easy to explain in connexion with the supposed allusion to the names Henry and Mary. Within the hoop is engraved a small escutcheon, charged with a lion rampant, and surmounted by an arched crown; the tressure of Scotland alone is wanting to give a royal character to this little achievement, which is accompanied by the inscription—HENRI. L. DARNLEY.—1565. This is doubtless to be read, Henry Lord Darnley.

It may now be impracticable to ascertain the precise period when Mary Stuart and her young cousin exchanged that mutual troth, of which possibly this interesting ring may have been a pledge; but there can be little doubt that Darnley became her accepted suitor in the early part of the year 1565, the date here found inscribed. Rumours of the Queen's engagement to Lord Darnley had been, it is

true, prevalent at the Court of Holyrood, as early as the commencement of 1562.² It was, however, during Henry's stay with Mary at Wemyss Castle, where she received him in February, 1564-5, that Darnley may have first found favourable occasion to plead his suit; he was with Mary again immediately on her return to Holyrood House, towards the close of that month; and when his impatience so far broke through the proprieties of royal etiquette as to make him venture on a proposal of marriage, Mary, as Sir James Melville writes on the occasion, took it in evil part at first, and refused the ring which he then offered to her.

This occurred in March, and about the second week of April the nuptials were celebrated privately in Stirling Castle.³ On May 15, 1565, the Queen met her nobles in the Parliament Hall there, and signified her intention of espousing Darnley, which was received without a dissentient voice. It was on that same occasion that she created him Lord of Ardmanach and Earl of Ross. On July 23, the public celebration of her marriage being fixed, the banns proclaimed, and the Pope's dispensation obtained, Mary created Darnley Duke of Albany, and on the 28th she issued her warrant commanding the heralds to proclaim him King of Scotland, in virtue of the bond of matrimony to be solemnised on the following day in the chapel of Holyrood. The next morning the proclamation as king was repeated, and thenceforth all documents were subscribed—Henry and Marie R.

Two points of difficulty obviously present themselves in regard to this ring, the interest of which is of no ordinary kind, if it may be received as unquestionably a relic of that important period in the fortunes of Darnley, still more important in the calamitous course of public affairs in Scotland. The introduction of a T. in the monogram requires more satisfactory explanation than has hitherto, to our knowledge, been suggested. Some have thought to trace in this initial some allusion to the royal house of Tudor, since Darnley's maternal grandmother, it will be remembered, was Margaret daughter of Henry VII. of England, and dowager of James IV. King of Scots, grandfather of Queen Mary. Thus both the affianced parties, on the occasion for which this remark-

² Miss Strickland, "Lives of the Queens of Scotland," vol. iii. p. 289.

³ Ibid. vol. iv. pp. 97, 113. Labanoff, Appendix, vol. vii. p. 67.

able token of betrothal may have been prepared, might alike claim descent, in the second generation, from the Tudor race, and how momentous were the questions involved in that claim and that descent!

The other feature of detail, not easily to be explained, is the introduction of the lion rampant within the ring, accompanied by the royal crown, and the date when Mary actually conferred on Darnley the title of king. Under these circumstances, a single bearing being thus specially selected, not the ancestral coat of Darnley's family, it might naturally be expected that the lion of Scotland would appear, accompanied by the tressure, which, however, is here wanting. The conjecture is indeed not inadmissible, in the absence of any other solution of the difficulty, that the diminutive size of the escutcheon may have occasioned either the omission of the tressure, or that the tressure may have been expressed merely on the surface of the red enamel, now wholly lost, with which the field of the miniature achievement was doubtless filled up.⁴

ALBERT WAY.

⁴ It has been conjectured that the lion rampant might possibly be the ancient bearing of the earldom of Fife, which appears to have been borne by the Dukes

of Albany, and may have been placed on this ring in special allusion to that title being conferred on Darnley on the day previous to his marriage.