

## REMARKS ON SOME LONDON RELICS.

BY SYDNEY SMIRKE, ESQ. A.R.A. F.S.A. &c.

[Read in the French Gallery, Pall Mall, February 26, 1856.]

I HAVE much pleasure in submitting herewith a few antiquarian reliquiæ, chiefly of old London. They will appear, I am afraid, trivial, and scarcely deserving of the attention of this Meeting, but they have certainly an interest in connection with my own particular branch of archæological pursuit, and possess at least the merit of authenticity, for they have been for the most part obtained either by my own hand, or under my own eye.

Of these objects I will proceed to give a brief description.

No. 1 is the leathern sheath of a knife which was found in a crevice of the old masonry of the east wall of Westminster Hall when the more modern ashlared facing was removed, and the old masonry restored in 1835. On that occasion an immense deposit of the bones of poultry and of other small animals, evidences no



Leathern Knife-sheath, found in Westminster Hall.

doubt of the many regal festivities held in that hall, was found in the crevices of the masonry, dragged in there by rats and mice, and this sheath was probably mistaken by them for something edible. That it has been the property of one of the royal household may be inferred from the fleurs de lys and the lions passant impressed on the surface of it.

No. 2 is a sample of the cloth in which was wrapped one of the bodies of certain knights disinterred when the Temple Church was repaired. The body was in a leaden coffin of high antiquity, of which several were discovered, and which were surmised to have belonged to the well-known carved effigies so ably restored by our Member Mr. Richardson. Time has singularly changed the aspect of this cloth, but I presume that it has been some species of sackcloth: it strongly resembles the material in which two bodies were enveloped that were discovered beneath the pavement of the Chapel Royal of St. James, near the north or altar end of the chapel, when that building was restored about twenty-five years ago.

No. 3 are wooden wedges taken out of the bed-joints of one of the marble pillars in the round nave of the Temple Church. They seemed to have been used to wedge up the stone, when it was laid, to its true level, according to the usual practice of masons at the present day, although a modern mason would be severely reprehended for using a *wooden* wedge for such a purpose.

No. 4 is an iron wedge similarly used, and also obtained from the Round Church. The thickness of these wedges shews that the joints of this masonry, like that of much of the Norman work, were somewhat clumsy, very different from the fine jointing of the masonry usual in the succeeding age.

No. 5 is the base of one of the Norman pillars which were found embedded in the main walls of Westminster Hall when that building was restored in 1835. These pillars formed part of an arcade ornamenting the upper part of the side walls of that hall, the arches being at certain intervals windows, in the manner of a clerestory. Almost all, if not all the bases that I met with had the small angle ornament, a leaf or a claw (or in this case an animal's head), common on Norman bases, occurring also in much

earlier buildings of the post-Roman period in Italy and elsewhere. An eminent writer and critic of the present day has surmised that this curious feature was introduced by the rude but nervous artists of that time as expressive of firmness, as if the pillar gripped, as it were, the base it stood on. I venture however to entertain a doubt whether this quaint device was not purely æsthetic, and adopted as an obvious and effective mode of accommodating the square base to the circular shaft.

No. 6 is a fragment saved from the ruins of St. Stephen's Chapel, on which the original painting and gilding are still perceptible. I submit that it should be among the foremost duties of our long-needed local Society (whose earlier existence would have rescued many a valuable relic now for ever lost to history) to find some safe, permanent, and honourable resting-place for the "old materials" of the extinct monuments of London.

No. 7 is one of the small roses which profusely decorate the ceiling of the Chapel Royal of St. James's: it is of lead, of which metal other of the small enrichments on that ceiling have been made, affording good evidence that plaster decoration had not come into general use in Henry VIII.'s time. The ceiling is, no doubt, well known to most of my hearers; it is coffered and richly painted, and the initial letters H. and A., connected by a true-lover's knot, sufficiently indicate the period of its construction. As the style of this ceiling is Renaissance, and as we know that Holbein, who worked in that style, was in the service of the Crown about this time, I believe we may safely regard this ceiling as a specimen of Holbein's architecture.

I owe you an apology for introducing to your notice No. 8, as it belongs not to Middlesex, but to Suffolk. I adduce it, however, as another evidence that at the last-mentioned period plaster or stucco ceilings had not become general. It is a specimen of a fibrous and somewhat coarse material, of which an ornamented ceiling is made in a house called "Wolsey's house," in Ipswich. I am informed that a very similar substance appears to have been used for a like purpose in Hampton Court Palace. It may be regarded as one of the earliest attempts of our workmen to produce an artificial substitute for wood and stone.

No. 9 is also an object which I am afraid I am scarcely justified in submitting to you on this occasion, for it comes from York. It is a leaden pin or dowel which secured a butt joint in one of the ribs of the nave vaulting of the Minster, at the point where the original oak ribs sprang from the stone springers. The use of lead for such a purpose, although unknown to modern practice, seems ingenious and worthy of adoption. The lead being run in when fluid, the workman secures without trouble, and with perfect certainty, the exact fitting of the plug to the hole cut to receive it.

I am afraid that this enumeration of small antiquities which I have ventured to submit to you this evening has already occupied more of your time and attention than they merit; but before sitting down I would wish to be permitted, in a few words, to urge antiquaries generally, but more especially those among them who are my professional brethren, and who have therefore frequent occasion to deal with the architectural works of our forefathers, not to overlook these small matters. When scanning the lofty spire, or estimating the static value of the ponderous buttress, let them not pass by those minor contrivances, a few of which I have had the honour to bring to your notice this evening. If not always fraught with instruction, they will never fail to be found interesting.

One of our most eminent living historians, Lord Stanhope, has, on a somewhat similar occasion, made the following true and forcible remarks:—"If on this point I may venture to give you any counsel, it would be this: not to neglect any incident, however slight, however trifling, or unimportant it may appear to you at the time, either in manners or in biography, if by those incidents the accurate facts of the case and the true delineation of character can be brought before you. Do not, from a false idea of the dignity of history, neglect the sources of information most readily accessible and within your reach; for, in my opinion, great characters are often best portrayed by small circumstances."

If this may be said with truth of History, I am sure you will concur with me in thinking that it is equally true of Archæology.

An apparently very insignificant fact will lead sometimes to very large conclusions. In fossil geology the student knows how much may be learned from a single tooth or a scale ; and even from the mere impression of a bird's claw Philosophy has been able to restore a lost page in the history of the creation. So, in our own pursuit, from such trivial objects as I have this evening ventured to bring before you perhaps not unimportant inferences might be drawn.



CLEGGING

Leaden Fibula of the Saxon period, in the possession of the Rev. Thomas Hugo.  
(Described at p. 143.)