

ART. IX. — *A Manual of Gold and Silver Coins of all Nations, struck within the Past Century ; showing their History and legal Basis, and their actual Weight, Finess, and Value, chiefly from original and recent Assays ; with which are incorporated Treatises on Bullion and Plate, Counterfeit Coins, Specific Gravity of Precious Metals, etc., with recent Statistics of the Production and Coinage of Gold and Silver in the World, and Sundry useful Tables.* By JACOB R. ECKFELDT, and WILLIAM E. DU BOIS, Assayers of the Mint of the United States. *Illustrated by numerous Engravings of Coins, executed by the Medal-ruling Machine, and under the Direction, of JOSEPH SAXTON, of the United States Mint.* Published at the Assay Office of the Mint. Philadelphia. 1842. 4to. pp. 220.

WE have not at this time space sufficient to do full justice to this very useful and beautiful book. The subject of coinage is interesting to two classes of individuals in every community. One of them consists of the few, who are curious to study coins historically from the earliest period, and who generally seek to make collections for their amusement, as well as instruction. The other and much larger class, is made up of practical men, who have occasion to handle the money of various nations, and to whom it is therefore of some consequence to be well informed of the various changes in external character, or intrinsic value, through which it is perpetually passing. In the United States there is as yet a very small number of persons, who feel either able or willing to make cabinets, though we have reason to know it to be increasing. On the other hand, the discredit into which the paper currency has been thrown, by events familiarly known to all, has had the effect rapidly to enlarge the class of people who prefer a strong-box to a bank for the safe-keeping of their coin. To each of these descriptions of persons, this work must be welcome. It professes to treat of the coinage of the world for a century past, but is most satisfactory as a supplement for the last twenty years, to the manuals issued before that time in the older countries of Europe. "Since the opening of the nineteenth century," we are told, in the introduction, "France has given the first standard of

this sort, England has supplied the second ; and a third is now offered from the United States." We are very glad, that the contribution on our part is one of which we have no cause to be ashamed in any way that a comparison may be instituted.

It is usual, in considering the subject of the currency, to contrast the coin, which is made out of the precious metals, and the bills, which consist of stamped paper, as if the two had nothing in common. Yet no individual, who has followed the history of coinage, can fail to observe, that, after all, they rest upon the same common basis of credit, and that almost as many tricks have been played upon the public credulity through the medium of hard money, as were ever put in practice with mere promises. The subject is fruitful, and some time or other we hope to have an opportunity to go into it at large. In China, perhaps the oldest civilized country in the world, it would appear as if the whole circle of experiments upon currency had been run through, and they had all equally failed. A silver dollar, that has had the fortune to pass from hand to hand, for any length of time in that country, will be inevitably curtailed of its fair proportions, and will show in the many minute stamps, which riddle it like a sieve, that some other test is required of its value than the inscription on its face. There is no coinage peculiar to China, excepting the brass pieces strung together by the hundred, eight hundred of which may perhaps be worth a silver dollar. To the highly sharpened perspicacity of the traders of that country, that is not silver which only glitters. The steelyard, and the crucible, form the only kind of national mint in which they put any confidence.

It is by no means clear, that the other nations of the world, in proportion as their knaves and rogues overtake in skill their prototypes in China, will not be ultimately reduced to the same expedient, that has been there adopted. And our merchants, too, may likewise in progress of time be obliged to consider a set of scales as an indispensable part of their daily dress. It is but a few months since the practice of *sweating* sovereigns in Great Britain, forced its government to undertake the enormous loss of re-coining, long before the old coinage was worn out. But sweating is only one ingenious device, that has succeeded many others in the history of English coins. We think it is already made tolerably certain,

that the same necessity will impose the same burden upon the British government at least as often as once in twenty years. Gold is so valuable, that no confidence can be placed in the correspondence between the stamp on a coin, and its worth, which is not frequently supported by trying its weight.

Then there is the danger of counterfeits, which are known, through specimens still remaining, to have circulated as long ago as in the times of ancient Rome. How nicely these can be made to deceive the senses, is well explained in the chapter upon that subject in the volume before us. Four or five hundred persons are annually convicted in Great Britain of this single crime, and the only reason why it is not equally common with us, is, that, whatever may be the intention of our legislation upon the subject, we have not now, and never have had, a currency consisting of the precious metals, especially of gold, which is best worth the labor of counterfeiting. It is easier to follow the fashion of the country, and manufacture paper, often quite equal in value to the genuine article it was made to imitate. But if the labors of some of our public men should prove successful in getting rid of this evil, the only effect will be to turn the ingenuity of a large class of industrious persons into a new channel, even more injurious to the community.

Thus far we have alluded only to the dangers to a metallic currency, that flow from sources unconnected with the government that authorizes it. But there are evils of no trifling magnitude, which often originate with the power that directs the mint itself. This book tells us, "that there are realms where the operations of this institution are state secrets." In these the relative quantity of alloy to precious metal may depend upon the necessities or the mental obtuseness of the sovereign, rather than upon any rule of honesty, or even of political economy. The French history is full of arbitrary and sudden changes in the value of the money of account. The Bank of Amsterdam originated in the intolerable evils growing out of a debased metallic currency in the various states of Germany and Holland. Charles the Twelfth of Sweden stamped copper dollars to pay his troops with. And, some of the independent States of South America have been recently playing tricks of a similar kind, more dangerous, perhaps, because not so bare-

faced. The decline and fall of the Roman Empire is as visible in the adulteration of her coinage as in the brilliant narrative of Gibbon. Who then can say, that credit is not an ingredient in the currency given to the precious metals when coined? And, even if we were to go back to the proposed gold bars of Mr. Ricardo, we should still be obliged to put some reliance upon the stamp that is to declare their purity. Otherwise we should either be exposed to the losses which come from alloying, pickling, or plating, as described in the present volume, or else be driven to the necessity of ourselves employing chemical tests in every instance in which we receive a bar.

Notwithstanding all this, we must beg leave to declare ourselves bullionists as it regards currency. And we should, for more reasons than one, be sorry to have the practice of stamping coins discontinued. They are an eloquent, though dumb, expositor of the vicissitudes of this world, even in its highest stations. And there is an elegance in the art, which to us is highly fascinating. Perhaps the portion of the present work which is most valuable, is that which treats of the coinage of the new South American republics; but it suggests to us few agreeable or consolatory associations. The most interesting coinage in the history of the world, notwithstanding the inferiority of the mechanical process then in use, is the series of Roman coins. The least so is our own. The reason of this is, that our dies present no variety of stamp or of inscription, neither historical record nor interesting association. We perceive that Mr. Hawkins, in his late work upon the British silver coinage, laments the baldness of the devices used in that kingdom; but even they are not so poor as ours. We go so far as to regret the almost nervous dread of monarchical attributes, which induced Washington to order the dies prepared with his head to be laid aside. But these are feelings in which we shall not be very extensively joined by those who study "the almighty dollar" with very different emotions from ours, and we shall therefore hasten to put an end to our dissertation.

No book upon coins is worth much without the aid of plates. The present volume is richly supplied with excellent ones. We have taken the pains to compare them with real specimens, and find the copy very accurate. Indeed,

how could it be otherwise, under the new and original plan which was adopted to obtain them? The chapter, explaining the manner in which the three discoveries of the present age, the Daguerrotype, electrotype, and machine-engraving have been made to subserve the present design, is among the most interesting in the book. We take leave of it, regretting only that our limits prevent us from furnishing extracts from it; and cheerfully recommend it as a very handsome production, and, considering the costliness of its preparation, furnished at a very reasonable price.

---

ART. X. — *American Notes for General Circulation.* By CHARLES DICKENS. In Two Volumes. London: Chapman & Hall, 186, Strand. 1842. 12mo. pp. 308 and 306.

A FEW years ago, a series of papers appeared in the "London Morning Chronicle," descriptive of London Life, Manners, and Character, under the signature of "Boz." These sketches attracted some attention at the time, by their cleverness, and their racy, lively style. Inquiries were occasionally made into their authorship; but nobody, at least on this side of the Atlantic, seemed able to tell us any thing about it. They had their run in the columns of the Chronicle, and were likely to find their tomb there also; but, soon afterward, the first number of the "Pickwick Papers" came out, purporting to be edited by the same lively Boz. This new work instantly and forcibly arrested the attention of the public, and the succeeding numbers were looked for with an eagerness which has been equalled only on the appearance of the same author's subsequent works. Fresh inquiries were made, who this new and remarkable writer could possibly be; and the name of Charles Dickens, a young man hitherto all unknown to fame, with nothing to aid him in circumstances or situation, in ancestral rank or family wealth, started into a celebrity, which, for extent and intensity, for its extraordinary influence upon social feelings and even political institutions, and for the strength of favorable regard and even warm personal attachment by which it has been accompanied all over the