

**CATALOGUE OF A MOST
SPLENDID AND INSTRUCTIVE
COLLECTION OF ANCIENT
ARMOUR: EXHIBITING AT THE
OPLOTECA**

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Catalogue of a Most Splendid and Instructive Collection of Ancient Armour: Exhibiting at the Oploteca by Smith and Davy

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SMITH AND DAVY

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CATALOGUE
OF
A MOST SPLENDID AND INSTRUCTIVE
Collection
OF
ANTIENT ARMOUR,
EXHIBITING AT THE
OPLOTHECA,
N^o. 20,
LOWER BROOK STREET, BOND STREET.

Forming a Series from the
NORMAN CONQUEST;
Including the greatest Variety of
Fine Shields, Helmets, Swords, Guns, &c. &c.

WITH A NUMBER OF BEAUTIFUL SUITS OF
Polished Steel and Fine Horse Armour,
WHICH WERE OBTAINED FROM THE KING OF BAVARIA
FOR
NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

LINCOLN
THE BEAUTIFUL CUIRASS OF SCALE ARMOUR,
Secretly Worn by
BONAPARTE;
AND THE SWORD AND FIRE ARMS PRESENTED TO HIM
By the Directory of the French Republic,
&c. &c. &c.

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INTRODUCTION.

THERE is no truer test by which we can judge of the progress or rank of national mind, than the state it exhibits in the ornamental arts. These generally go hand in hand with laws and literature. In the early stages of society we perceive them somewhat preceding, in the latter very closely following them. Hence we are induced to search into antiquity, and trace with delight the gradual tendency of the human species towards perfect civilization, and learn how to put a just value on the acquisitions of our forefathers.

Motives of aggression and self-defence have always occasioned the arts of war to precede the provisions for peace, consequently all nations have at first bestowed their chief attention on Arms offensive and defensive. While therefore skilful workmanship, ingenious contrivance, tastefulness in design, and delicacy in execution, were almost wholly confined to the protection, and weapons of the warrior, ANCIENT ARMOUR claims our peculiar attention.

The splendid Collection here exhibited to the Public, will, it is presumed, be found valuable, not only for its intrinsic worth, but as illustrating the manners of our

ancestors, and elucidating many points of history; to Painting, Sculpture, or the Stage, it will be found equally interesting, affording Artists the means of giving fidelity to their performances; and Actors correctness in their costume.

To those who are impressed with these sentiments, it must be matter of regret, that many fine specimens of Ancient Armour, handed down by a line of ancestors, have been suffered to go to decay in the venerable residences of many families in Europe, which a little care and attention would have preserved to the latest periods—and such as have escaped the ravages of time, in many instances, have been condemned as old Iron, and those valuable remains consigned to the neighbouring Blacksmiths, through want of feeling a sufficient interest in such a possession. As these are circumstances to which the very great scarcity of Ancient Armour is highly attributable, the Proprietor feels himself fortunate in having been enabled, by his unwearied researches, to procure so fine and perfect a collection; but few instances having occurred in which parts of a suit were lost, or entirely destroyed, and in those cases he has supplied their deficiencies with the utmost fidelity.

The hardy warriors of Northern Europe despised as effeminate, and coward-like, the defensive Armour which the relaxing climate of the East had introduced among the Asiatics, and did not adopt any protection but their native valour, till they experienced its inefficacy against their mail-clad antagonists. This historic fact is illustrated by the present collection, which gives the observer

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an opportunity of comparing the adoption by the latter, and the successive improvements of the former. It exhibits the Armour or Arms of the 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries; affording the finest specimens extant of the superb stile of the middle periods. Several specimens will be seen in this collection of exquisite workmanship, in Engravings and Chasings by Celini and other eminent Artists, who flourished in the time of the Tudors, from the designs of Raphael, Julio Romano, &c. &c. in particular the fine Helmet and Shield said to have belonged to Francis I. Beginning with chain armour, it therefore has the earliest commencement; for leather, quilted, or ring-tunics, were composed of too perishable materials to have come down to the present time.

In the Tower of London there is not any suit older than the time of Henry VII. so that the public have been, and still continue to be misled by the stories of the warders, who attribute to John of Gaunt, De Courcy, and others, Armour that was not made until two or three centuries after the time in which they lived.

Armour was originally of leather, the Lorica of the Romans, and Cuirasse of the French, both bearing testimony to that fact. The Roman armour, with its lam-brequins, is too well known to need description. The Danes of Canute's time appear, from illuminations in the British Museum, to have worn a quilted tunic, and a similar covering for their legs and feet; while their heads were defended by skull-caps, a nasal or projecting piece protected the nose. We learn from similar authorities

that the Saxon kings in the eighth century covered their leather military tunics with contiguous rings, a mode so rare also among their adversaries the Britons, as to give even names to several of the Cambrian kings, as Maelgwn, (*Mail-clad,*) &c. In the Conqueror's time, the tunic similar to that of the Danes, and a skull-cap much resembling theirs, were the only defence of the Norman chiefs, and his sons seem, from the Baieux tapestry, seals, &c. only to have changed the quilting for scale or contiguous ring-work, and to have covered completely the legs and thighs, which in their father's time had no protection but the ordinary boot. Stephen seems to have introduced chain armour, which subsequent sovereigns covered with a surcoat of silk.

The Equestrian Figure, at the end of the Inner Armoury, is a fine specimen of chain mail; but whether this was the double chain, we meet with in authors, so called in distinction from the ring-work, or whether that was a name given only to the closer chain-work, is not quite so clear, as all the specimens of chain mail exhibit but four rings interlaced.

Although the seal of Baldwin Earl of Flanders represents him when Emperor of Constantinople, as wearing greaves, this ancient Greek protection was not adopted in England till the latter part of the reign of Edward I. — During this period the hood, *coiffe de maille*, or *capuchon*, was drawn up over the head, or thrown down round the neck of the knight, while the conical nasal skull-cap of the Conqueror's time, became cylindrical, and covered the face, having apertures pierced in it to

admit light and air. A peculiar kind of Armour distinguished the reign of the third Henry. It seems from the illuminations, for there is no other representation of it, nor from its nature could it be durable itself, to have consisted of several small plates of iron partially covering each other, sewn on cloth or leather, and bound round, about every four inches distance with straps.

Towards the close of his reign, gonfanons or pieces placed on the shoulders to protect the throat, somewhat in the nature of the passe-guards of later times, were much used, and the helmet became again cylindrical. This reign also introduced knee and elbow caps.

Plate armour may owe to Edward III. its use in England. This king added to the greaves of his grandfather, a breast and back plate, thigh pieces, pauldrons, vambraces, and gauntlets, at first partially covering, and then generally supplanting the use of mail.

Instead of the *coiffe de mail* for the head, and *aventails* for the throat, he introduced a conical skull-cap, the *coiffe de fer*, to which was appended a ringed gorget, over which in time of battle was placed the helmet. In Henry VIIIth's time additional pieces were appended to the lower part of the breast plate, of a pointed form, and called *tassets*. These hung over the thighs, and were occasionally retained, but much altered and enlarged as late as the close of Charles Ist's reign. In the latter part of Henry VIIIth's time, when the *beuses* or feet pieces were first made square, the pauldrons or shoulder pieces had transverse protections, to prevent the thrust of the

tilting lance; and during the successive reigns terminating with that of James I., armour was made splendid in the extreme.

In Charles I's time jambes or steel boots were relinquished, and while the cavalry had their thighs protected by the cuisses, the infantry retained only the breast-plate, back plate and morion. In Charles II's time the cuisses were laid aside by the cavalry, and soon after the pauldrons and vambraces for the arms.—Of late the cuirass has altogether been disused, and the heroes of Britain seem to have regained their ancient confidence; with that distinguishing valour that has rendered their native constitutions sufficient armour against all opponents.

The Proprietor begs leave to state, that it was not his intention to have exhibited any specimen of *Modern Armour or Arms*; but the very curious and beautiful Cuirass of Scale Armour, secretly worn by Buonaparte in his expedition to Egypt, was an article of too much interest to refuse admittance—and as the most appropriate appendage to it, the proprietor has been enabled to add the *Sword and Case of Fire Arms*, of exquisite workmanship, presented by the Directory of the French Republic to their favourite General—these, with a French Cuirass, Carbine, &c. taken at the glorious *Battle of Waterloo*, connect and bring down offensive and defensive Armour to the present time.