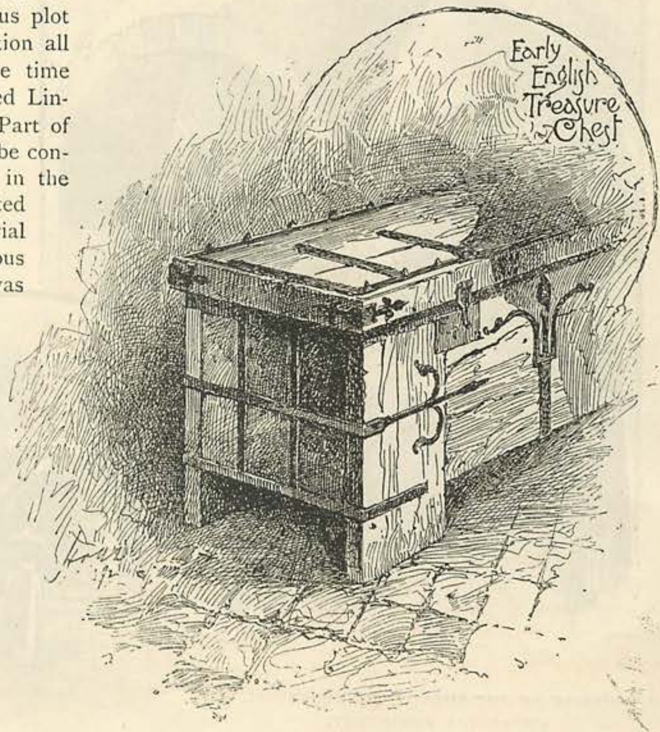
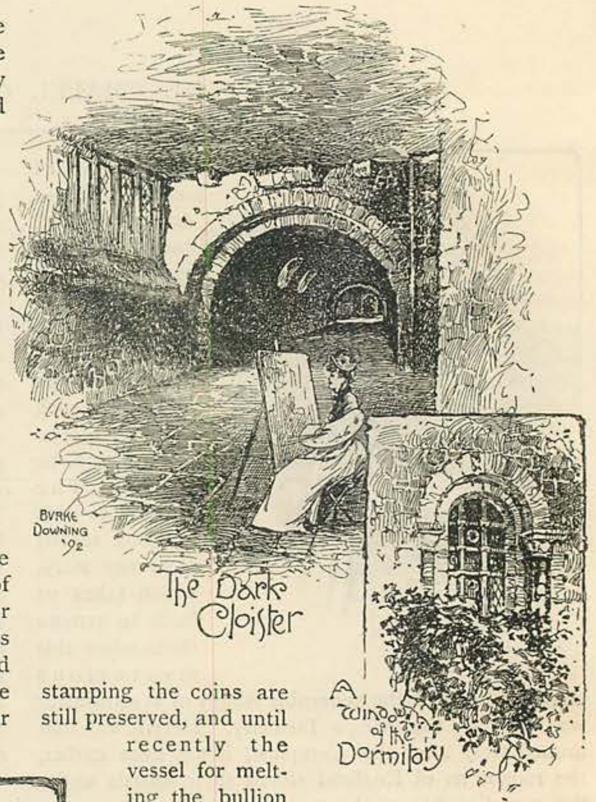
THE CHAPEL OF THE PYX.

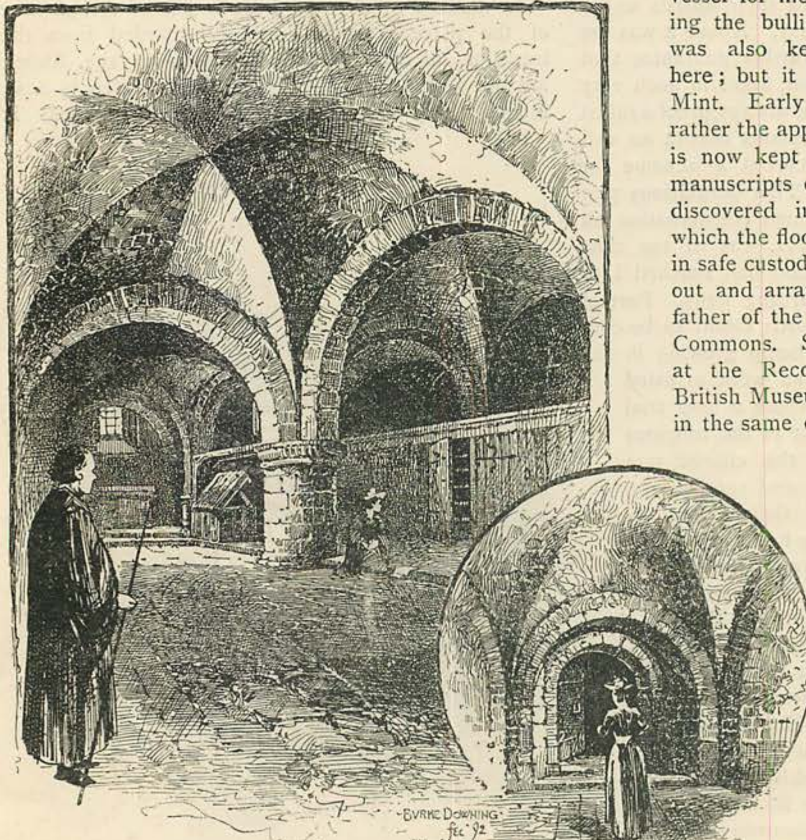
FRAGMENTS of human skin—dried, shrivelled, and soiled with age—may still be seen lining the inside of one of the doors of the Pyx chapel. How did such weird relics come to be there? The answer to this question recalls a strange story, which takes us back to remote times when this mysterious chamber beneath the venerable Abbey of Westminster was used as the King's Treasury. Here it was that immediately after the Conquest, if not even earlier, the monarchs of England stored their hoards under the guardianship of the sanctuary. Above it was the monastic dormitory—surely a further guarantee that the treasure would be safe. But, alas! in such very early times even monks were not always proof against worldly temptations. History relates that in an evil moment several of them conceived a scheme for actually robbing the treasury! This burglarious plot was carried into effect, and excited consternation all over the land. King Henry III. was at the time engaged in his Scottish wars, and had reached Linlithgow when he heard the startling news. Part of the stolen treasure was afterwards found to be concealed amid a thick crop of hemp growing in the cloisters. Eighty of the monks were arrested and conveyed to the Tower, where a long trial followed. The Abbot, and most of the religious fraternity were released, but the charge was brought home to the sub-prior and sacrist. They were flayed alive, and their skins nailed to the door by which they had broken into the sacred chamber—there to remain by way of gruesome warning to the clergy as they paced the cloisters or mounted to their sleeping-place. An ancient chronicler of Westminster repudiates the idea that any of the pious brotherhood were so wicked as to be concerned in the robbery. But the late Dean Stanley held that the facts were too stubborn to be gainsaid. He adds that the chief robber, doubtless, was one Richard de Podlicote, who had already incurred suspicion of having by means of a ladder got through the window of the Chapter House, whence he carried off a considerable quantity of silver plate. In the still more audacious attempt upon the royal treasury, he concerted with some nefarious friends within the precincts. As a protection from any similar outrage, the approach from the northern side was walled off. But the charm of the place was broken, and its more valuable contents were removed elsewhere. Thenceforward it was used only for storing the regalia, State records, copies of international treaties, and the box (or pyx) containing the die of the coin of the realm. One by one these glories have since passed away, except the pyx, which remains and gives its name to the historic chamber. The regalia remained there in the times of the Commonwealth. Henry Marten was then charged with the duty of examining these showy emblems of discarded royalty. Dragging the crown, sceptre, and robe from their chest, he put them on George Wither, the poet, of whom it is recorded, that being thus royally arrayed, "he first marched about the room in the stately garb, and afterwards, with a thousand apish and ridiculous actions, exposed these relics to contempt and laughter."

In modern times what little is left of the majesty of the place is more jealously guarded from the intrusion of the profane. Visitors to the Abbey are not admitted to the Pyx Chapel, which is now, indeed, rarely opened, except for official purposes. It



is situated in the eastern cloister, south of the entrance to the Chapter House. The extreme care with which it has always been protected is shown by the provision of heavy double doors, solid and ironbound. These are opened by six large keys, which used to be kept by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and two other high officers of State. Formerly these functionaries had all to be present together with their respective keys when the chamber was unlocked. Even now, it is no easy matter to secure a peep at the interior, official permission having to be obtained. Although called a chapel, there is no trace of its having been used as such. It is really a vault, and so dark that nothing can be seen without the aid of candles. In one corner are the remains of what some authorities declare to be the tomb of Hugolin, the Confessor's chamberlain, whose strict guardianship of the royal treasure kept even his royal master in awe. He was the great prototype of the English Chancellors of the Exchequer. The early Norman pillar in the centre of the chamber and some antique features of the roof illustrate the claim of this mysterious chamber to be the one undoubted relic of Edward the Confessor's architecture. The early coins of the Norman period were kept, if not also made, in the Pyx Chapel. The ancient punches used in those bygone centuries for stamping the coins are still preserved, and until recently the vessel for melting the bullion was also kept here; but it has now been removed to the Mint. Early in this century, the place had rather the appearance of a lumber cell, but it is now kept in good order. Thousands of manuscripts connected with the Abbey were discovered imbedded in the rubbish with which the floor was piled up. These are now in safe custody. The old treaties were cleared out and arranged by Sir Francis Palgrave, father of the present Clerk of the House of Commons. Some of these are now preserved at the Record Office, and others at the British Museum. They were formerly littered in the same oak chests and presses as had always contained them—the same which Agard, Warden of the Standards in 1610, described as being then ancient. The presses now contain nothing but old Exchequer tallies, ancient seals, and still more ancient keys. Readers may not be generally aware that it was the burning of a surplusage of these curious wooden tallies which led to the destruction by fire of the old Houses of Parliament.





DOORWAY OF THE TIME OF THE CONFESSOR.
UNDER THE DORMITORY.

The one characteristic use

still made of the old chapel is the storage of the assay plates or standards for testing the weight and fineness of the gold and silver coinage. These are in the custody of the Board of Trade, and are produced by Mr. Chaney, Director of the Standards Department, when required annually, for what is known as "the trial of the Pyx."

It may here be explained that the Pyx is a box in which a certain number of coins of every denomination are placed by the Master of the Mint, as specified in the Coinage Act of 1870. When moved in due course to hold a trial, the Treasury, in accordance with time-honoured custom, instructs the Goldsmiths' Company to appoint for the purpose an expert and competent jury. The standard plates are then taken from the Pyx Chapel to the Goldsmiths' Hall. The first business of the jury is to count all the coins submitted to them in the Pyx, to see that their numbers tally with the Mint accounts. They then have to weigh the coins in bulk and several individually, and to apply various assaying tests by fire and acids to coins both of gold and silver. An especially severe chemical examination is made as to purity of ingots made from certain coins of either metal. All their findings in these operations have to be embodied in a verdict, which is afterwards published in the *London Gazette*. After the trial, the assay plates are carefully returned to the Pyx Chapel, where they have always been kept since the Norman period. Although forming part—and the oldest part—of the fabric of Westminster Abbey, that chamber never passed under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical authority, but has always remained in the possession of the State. Overshadowed but not absorbed by the ecclesiastical influences around, it testifies at once to the sacredness and to the independence of the Crown.

TWO POPULAR STYLES OF ART-NEEDLEWORK.

RICH Oriental effects, sparkle and glitter, bright pure colours, gleam of gold and silver—these are the characteristics of many of the embroideries and fabrics in use for houses at the present time. Though there is said to be some slight diminution in the amount of gold thread now employed, it is amply made amends for by the purl, the bullion, the gold gimp and cord. One of the favourite colours of the season is bright primrose, for brilliance almost equalling buttercup yellow, but differing in tint. The sparkle and glitter are given by the cut jewels of many hues. To the list of showy requisites for modern embroideries we might add gold and silver spangles, as well as tinsels, with red, blue, green, or yellow silk interwoven.

The jewels are made of various shapes and sizes. The round ones are useful for centres of flowers and for filling in between scroll outlines. Oval stones come in well for centres of petals, for stars, and for narrow borderings. Some are uncut, but these are not so generally liked, for they are not as effective as the cut ones. A thin leaf of metal is laid on at the back to increase the sparkle, and they are pierced for sewing on to the materials. Rubies and emeralds, as a matter of course, are imitated in these cut-glass "jewels," but, for our part, we admire most the pieces of work which are studded only with the palest coloured gems, such as delicate pink and yellow topazes, the lightest aqua marines thrown up with a few diamonds. Sapphires and opals have not been forgotten, so there is no lack of choice.

Gilt-mounted jewels are most attractive for certain kinds of work. They are set singly in the nearest approach to gold claw setting, taking into account the metal and the price. These, it goes without saying, are more expensive than unset stones, but then only a few are needed in comparison. Later on we will show how these can be appropriately introduced by workers.

Now, as to the materials, we give the palm to plush. Velvet follows next, then silk, and lastly satin. Crêpe and chiffon are permissible, but rather difficult to manage. If either of these thin materials is chosen three layers must be tacked on to a foundation of slightly stiff muslin, and the embroidery worked, and jewels sewn on right through the foundation; this is, if we want our work to last, and not "drag." For draperies of dresses the crêpe is left clear, but for articles for the home it is best to back the fragile fabric as we have suggested. Fine French cloth is a favourite material with many embroiderers: it is durable, and the colours it is now dyed must please the most fastidious taste. Whether jewel embroidery is suitable for washing fabrics will probably remain a vexed question. If a thing looks pretty only a minority are inclined to cavil at its want of merit from an artistic point of view, and to make any objection to it on account of incongruity between material and decoration. Anyhow, both linen and sateen are ornamented with the imitation jewels and find admirers.

We place plush first, as the depth of shade and the reflections of light materially assist in throwing up the jewels. Velvet is rather harder looking, more uncompromising, especially the velveteen which so many substitute for silk velvet. Still we would not hinder our readers from selecting it if they feel so inclined, for the latest fashion is to cover cushions with velvet. It has always been the one stuff chosen by jewellers to show off precious stones—at least as long as our memory serves; but lately we notice some are using plush in its place. Probably this is a revival, as most fashions are if we did but know it.

If we describe a cushion we have before us, while