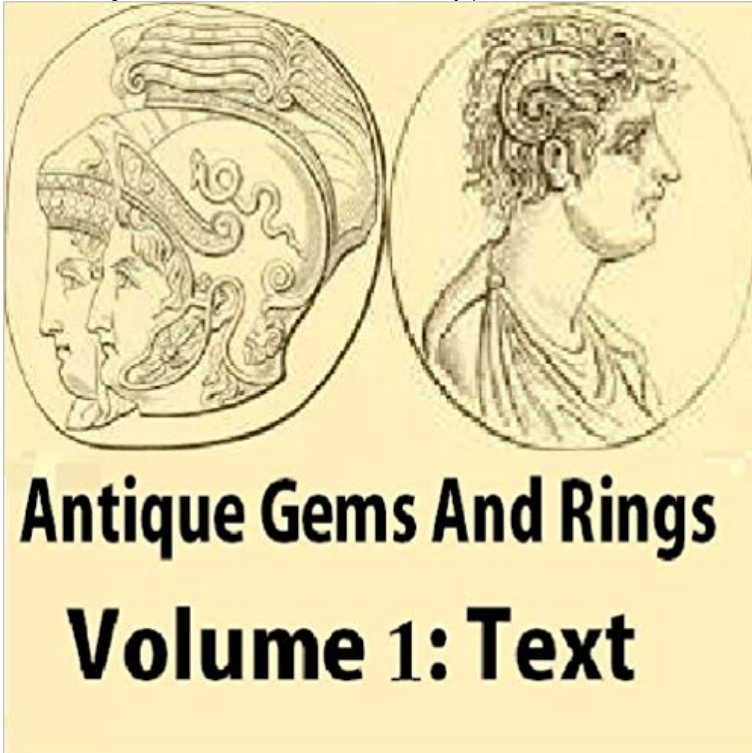


Antique Gems and Rings V1: Text



PREFACE. My *Antique Gems*, though complimented by too flattering reviewers as an exhaustive book, was in truth little more than an attempt at giving a general view of the numerous and widely differing branches of an enormously extensive subject. The very favourable reception, however, granted by the literary world to this first attempt, encouraged me, during the following decade, to carry out three of its sections to something more like the fulness that their nature and interest demanded. Thus the section of *Materials* grew, after some years of further research and elaboration, into a fresh volume, equalling its parent in size, and which in a second edition again nearly doubled its contents, under the title of *The Natural History, Ancient and Modern, of Precious Stones, &c.* The chapters treating of the supernatural properties attached by antiquity to the subjects of the glyptic art had previously furnished a field for long and continuous labour in drawing up what, after all, was a very incomplete account of matters requiring so much research; but which, nevertheless, filled a large volume, as *The Gnostics and their Remains*. The same subject, of all others the most deeply interesting to myself (but, unluckily, not so to the public), has since that publication occupied much of my time, and its continued pursuit has resulted in an accumulation of matter that would, if ever called for, treble the bulk of its predecessor in the same walk. All who have seriously entered into such studies, are well aware that to treat of Gnostic monuments with the completeness that their abundance, variety, and bearing upon the history of religion demand, would require an extension of limits compared with which those of the volume just mentioned would appear no more than of a hasty sketch. And, lastly, whatever the original text contained upon the rise and progress of glyptics in connection with the history of creative art

in general, being brought together into a continuous form, and supplemented with an account of public collections of gems, and the more important pieces they possess, constituted by themselves a treatise of considerable extent, under the name of *The Handbook of Engraved Gems*. Nevertheless, after all this cutting and carving from the parent stock, there was still left intact what the actual amateur and collector of the productions of the art would regard with good reason as the most essential portion of the whole. This was all that relates to gems viewed as objects for the cabinet, and valuable in exact proportion to their authenticity and fulfilment of the promise they bear upon their face; for which end information upon dimensions, forms, mechanical execution, subjects, and styles, was particularly demanded from a book professing to offer guidance to the dactyliologist in every walk of his pursuit. Equally desiderated by the same class of readers was the knowledge of the uses which the objects of their pursuit had originally subserved, and of the various fashions devised by ancient taste and ingenuity to enable them best to perform those purposes. With a view to the accomplishment of this remaining portion of my self-imposed duty, I have taken every opportunity, during the interval since my first essay in this department, of collecting information upon the last-mentioned points, partly practical, from the examination of numerous cabinets, opened to me by the kindness of their possessors, to whom my first book had served for a letter of recommendation; from the perpetual communication of fresh types on the part of all sorts of collectors seeking information from one whom they seemed to take for granted had set up for an oracle, in *re gemmaria*, by the committing of himself to print; from the unremitting collection and study of a large series of casts of all important gems; and, lastly, from never losing a chance of forming an opinion upon every work that came within my reach, belonging to the

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