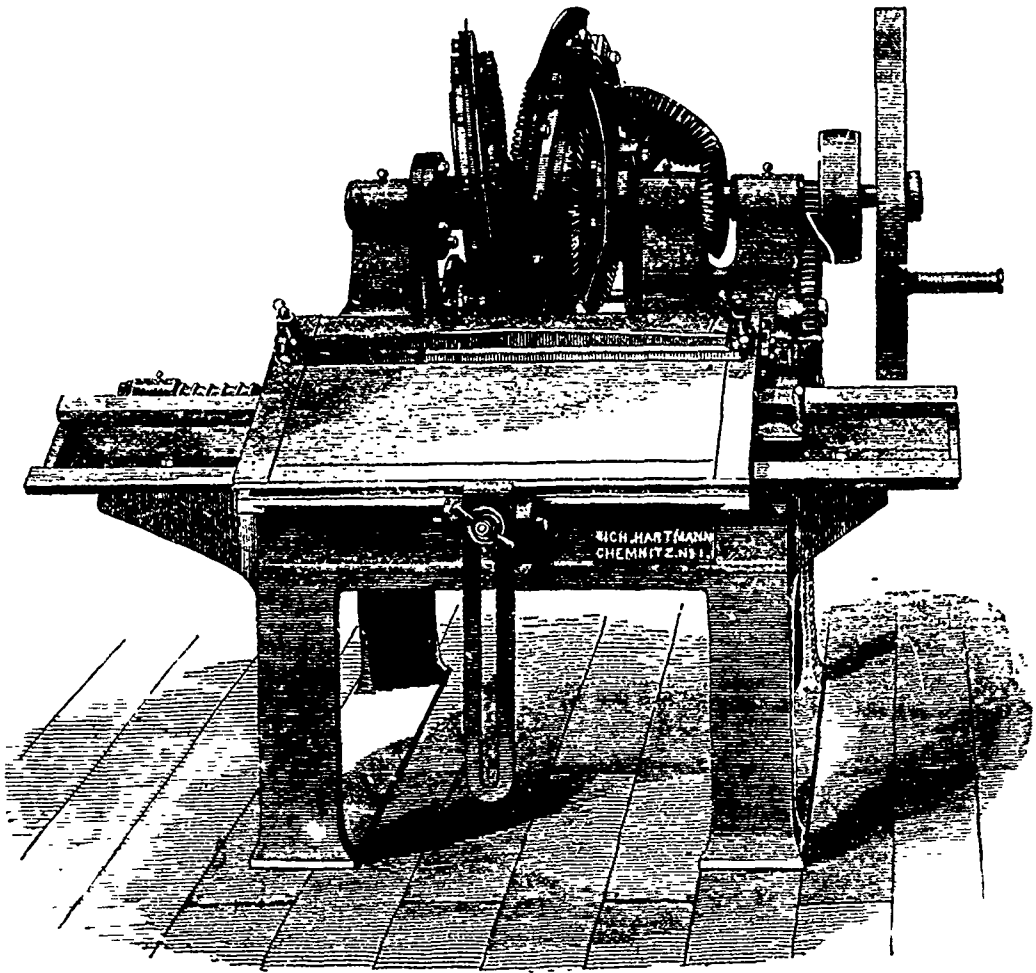

DOVETAILING MACHINE.

THE POWER OF MODERN "MECHANISM": ITS INFLUENCE ON ART.

The world has been told more than once, and with no little authority, that we are remarkable, if for anything in this age and in this country, for our most wonderful power of "mechanism" No one, who will think about it for a moment attentively and seriously, can possibly doubt the potency of the machine: for a visitor to any one of our famous manufactories, giving but a glance at what is going on in it, must feel assured that mechanism is gradually and certainly taking the place of the human element, which has hitherto been a part, and an essential part, of mundane work. It would be very difficult, indeed, to find in the nature of things a more foundationally suggestive subject of thought, as one more capable of influencing practice and practical life, than this of the ever growing power of mechanism. The subject just now is more than usually interesting from the fact of its taking a somewhat leading part in the discussions of the various scientific bodies which meet for "conferences" at this season of the year We might specially refer to the address delivered to the Mechanical Engineers by their President, wherein the "power of machinery" is made to be all but omnipotent, even as things are, but in the future promises to be absolute master, almost of men's thoughts: and when the whole human race shall combine its powers—powers which, when isolated, accomplish such marvels—its good, and its possible evil effects may surpass even our dreams. A few thoughts, then, on "mechanism," as it progresses and promises to rule all things, even itself, may have a special interest at the present moment, and may rouse a thinker here and there.

In the first place, to philosophise a little, it must be remembered that the time was when there was, in our present sense of the word, no "mechanism," no "enginery." Force, or power, to do heavy work, was got out of human strength. Huge bodies of men, as represented in the Egyptian drawings and sculptures, did the work of the world; and dug and brought up the materials from the earth, and moved them about afterwards. Levers and ropes were all that were used to move the huge Colossi from the quarry to the temple, for which they were sculptured; and kings even do not seem to have disdained to look on if not to "superintend" the moving of them. All the great and famous temples and public buildings of antiquity everywhere—for let us for the moment confine our attention to the mechanical force utilised in buildings—were put together, we are quite sure, without the aid of the steam-engine, that magic bit of mechanical engineering, which, but to name, is to explain the progress of modern society. In all antiquity there was most surely nothing like it, or in any way approximating to it. Yet, with all this deficiency of mechanism, did the antique times, and the men who lived in them, accomplish work which we nowadays strive our very utmost, in vain too, to rival, or even to imitate. Why is this? Is mechanism, which Mr. Bramwell so vaunted before the mechanical engineers, a thing to be regretted, or is it a thing misused, or is it indeed a something which we have yet to see into the true nature of; and to use, but not to over-use.

Tredgold, one of the founders of the age of mechanism, for this is not too strong a term to use here, said that, "Engineering is the art of directing the great sources of power in nature for the use and convenience of man." Accepting this broad definition, the president went on to prove, by a variety of proofs, drawn from every source around us, that we owe—to