

sides, or to half the height of the altar of incense. And the same is true of similar representatives of the most commonly received units of weight and measure of capacity. What the original type might be, which such standard professed to represent, matters little. The inhabitants of a nation might agree to use for their unit of length the foot of one of their ancient heroes, or the hundredth part of the height of their principal church, or the hundred thousandth part of the extreme breadth of their country from sea to sea. But as these objects could never be appealed to for the settlement of any practical dispute between man and man, or to convict the user of any fraudulent measure, a material and producible object must exist in some safe custody, carefully preserved, or safe in its received sanctity, from damage; and authoritatively declared, and generally believed to be, rigorously equal in length to its prototype; and to have been, at some period, however remote, ascertained to be so by some appropriate process of comparison; or, at all events, by the exact copying of some former and lost standard so compared. And from the moment of such authoritative declaration, the length of this material representative necessarily becomes the *real* and *legal unit of length*. The hero may turn out, on a close and irreverent scrutiny of history, to have been a purely mythical personage; the church may have been consumed by fire; the breadth of the land diminished by the encroachments of the sea: but so long as the standard remains uninjured by rough usage, and secured from loss by a sufficient multiplication of authentic copies, its