XXXVIII. *A Dissertation on an antient Jewel of the Anglo-Saxons. By the Rev. Mr. Pegge.*

Read March 5, 1752.

THERE is a well-known and curious piece of gold in the Bodleian library, of which I must here take some notice, though it be not properly a coin. It has been no less than four times engraved; first by Dr. Plot, then in Camden, after that by Sir Andrew Fountaine, and lastly by Mr. Wile. And all the gentlemen concerned, to whom I may add Mr. Thwaites, have respectively given their opinions of it, but are so discordant among themselves, that there is indeed great room, and great occasion for a Moderator to compose differences between them, and, if one may be so happy, to give the true explication of it.

Dr. Plot in his Nat. Hist. of Oxfordshire, p. 352.

“ BEFORE they (the Kings of England) touch for this distemper (the King’s evil), they have always prayers read suitable to the occasion; both which when performed, the King forthwith bestows on every Patient, a piece of Angel-Gold purposely coined, and put upon a White Ribbon, to be hung about the neck; which as long as worn, preserves the virtue of the touch However it be, that this was the custom *ab initio*, I take to be plain, from that piece of gold of King Edward the Confessor, Tab. xvi. fig. 5. found in St. Giles’s field, in the suburbs of Oxon, having the initial letters of his name over the hinder part of the head, and two small holes through it, as if designed to be hung on a ribbon, for the purpose above

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“ mentioned, the holes being strengthened with gold wire fastened round them, and to the piece itself, much after the fashion of the eye of a man’s doublet, as exactly described in the figure, *ut supra*; which piece was lent me by that courteous gentleman Sir John Holeman, Baronet, in whose possession it now remains, at his house near Northampton.”

Mr. Walker, in Camden, Tab. iv. N° 40.

“ THE fortieth is taken out of Dr. Plot’s History of Oxfordshire; it was found in digging the works at Oxford, and is, or not long since was, in the possession of Sir John Holman. It is supposed to be the gold given by Saint Edward the Confessor, at his curing the Scrophula, or the King’s-Evil. It is worth noting, that it hath upon it the figure of a woman veiled (not unlike a nun) whether of the Blessed Virgin, or some other holy woman, I cannot determine. But it seems much more proper for that function, than that now used of an angel; which was taken from the French.”

Mr. Thoresby, in Camden, ibidem.

THAT Edward the Confessor was the first of our Kings who cured the Struma is acknowledged by all, and that it was called the King’s-Evil upon that account, is probable enough; but, that he and the succeeding Kings gave pieces of gold in this form, may, I think, be justly scrupled, and can never be proved from E. C. the supposed initials of his name, who is never stiled Confessor upon any monies or medals of undoubted antiquity; and if gold had been coined and distributed upon this or any other occasion in those ages, a greater number of them, no doubt, would have been found in the cabinets of the curious, as well as their current monies; whereas nothing of that metal appears till Edward the III^d’s time; and that, perhaps, no other than the current silver money of each prince, except gilded for
“ distinction.

“ distinction. Such an one, with a hole for the ribbon to be
“ hung about the neck, was amongst the curiosities in the old
“ Lord Fairfax’s Museum, and is yet preserved in this. It has
“ the full face (as he is represented upon his great seal in Speed’s
“ history) with the arched crown, and may possibly be one of the
“ same numerical pieces given upon that occasion. As for the
“ curiosity described by the ingenious Dr. Plot, in his History of
“ Oxfordshire, and from him transmitted to N° 40, in this table,
“ I look upon it as a sort of Amulet (for which those darker su-
“ perstitious ages had an extraordinary veneration), like that
“ noble one of King Alfred, described by the learned Dr.
“ Hickes [a]; and do conclude with Dr. Wotton, that those pieces
“ inscribed Saint Edmond were of the like nature.”

Sir A. Fountaine, Differt. Epist. ad Comit. Penbrochiaë.

“ At vero mihi haud diffitendum est ne unum quidem (num-
“ mum aureum) aut a me unquam fuisse visum, aut inter legen-
“ dum mihi occurrisset, nisi in dissertatione illa Walkeriana, et
“ Historia Naturali comitatus Oxoniensis a Doctore Plot con-
“ scripta. Hic quidem scriptor, eumque secutus Walkerus,
“ nummum quadragintesium, in tabula octava (quam videre est
“ in prædicta editione Britanniae Camdenianae, autumant esse
“ Saxonicum, et qualem ad curandam Scrophulam, Edvardus cog-
“ nomento Confessor, hominibus morbo illo laborantibus elar-
“ giri solitus est. Sed ratiociniis adeo infirmis innixa est hæc
“ opinio, ut in tabulis nostris monetae Saxonicae nummus iste
“ nullum obtinuerit locum. Veruntamen iconem ejus infra ap-
“ ponere visum est, ut inde judices, Hon. Comes, quam valido
“ argumento contendat Walkerus nummum hominibus scro-
“ phula affectis elargiendum, monachae quam angeli (uti nunc
“ dierum in more positum est) imagine rectius esse signandum.”

Mr. Thwaites.

“ In the 161st page of Sir Andrew Fountaine’s Epistolary Dis-
“ sertation, a coin (or piece of money) represents, if I am not

[a] In his Thesaur. Ling. Vet. Septentr. p. 142.

“ mistaken, the head of Jesus Christ, with these letters, CA Σ Ω ;
 “ that is Christus, Alpha et Omega; Christ, Alpha and Omega,
 “ the beginning and ending, or first and last. His head is
 “ adorned with a triple crown. The little character Σ (E , and)
 “ is to be seen now in antient coins, struck in the same manner.
 “ It is taken from the Anglo-Saxon H , or T .”

Mr. Wife, Numm. Bodl. Catalog. p. 232.

“ SUPEREST dicendus nummus aureus, si nummum vocare fas
 “ sit, olim prope Oxoniam repertus, et a celeberrimo Johanne
 “ Radcliffe, M. D. scriniis Bodleianis donatus. Sane non diffi-
 “ milis est istis, quos bracteatos et cavos vocant Antiquarii Sep-
 “ tentrionales, scilicet, tam incusus quam excusus. Hunc pri-
 “ mus vulgavit Cl. Rob. Plot, M. D. in Hist. Naturali Comita-
 “ tus Oxoniensis, illumque autumavit ex iis esse, quos infirmis
 “ scrophula laborantibus dedit Edvardus Confessor. Quam etiam
 “ opinionem calculis suis probarunt alii eruditi: immo Cl. Edw.
 “ Thwaites literas A et Ω in epigraphe, si qua sit, videre voluit:
 “ vide Not. in Num. Saxon. Saeculum proculdubio olet, quin et
 “ opus forte, Saxonicum; at an unquam monetae infervierit, me-
 “ rito dubitatur. Quandoquidem Saxonibus in nummis propriis
 “ rarus aut nullus, uti diximus, auri fuit usus; a quo vero, in ci-
 “ meliis diversi generis fabricandis, eos neutiquam alienos fuisse
 “ abunde constat. Quare ipse in alium usum istud elaborari
 “ censeo; ad codicis, puta, aliive supellectilis, ornamentum; cujus
 “ etiam exteriori tegumento affixum fuisse, me maxime persuasum
 “ habeo.”

As to Dr. Plot's and Mr. Walker's notion of this being one of those pieces distributed by Edward the Confessor amongst the patients touched by him for the King's-Evil, the later Antiquaries, Sir Andrew Fountaine, Mr. Thoresby, and Mr. Wife, all agree to reject it, and, I think, very justly. In the first place, Dr. Plot builds his opinion upon the C, which he thought he discerned upon it, and which he imagined might denote Confessor; but that letter

letter is not a C, but a G. Secondly, I esteem the piece to be older than that Prince. Thirdly, I do not take it to be a coin. Fourthly, the head does not represent a woman veiled, consequently neither the Blessed Virgin, nor any other holy woman; in short, it is a person of a higher order, as will be seen below. To all which you may add, fifthly, the plausible objections raised by Mr. Thoresby.

MR. Thoresby very rightly judges it to be an Amulet; but he has contributed little to the explanation of it, since he adds nothing either concerning the effigies or the letters upon it, but leaves us still entirely in the dark as to them.

SIR Andrew, in effect, says little upon it; contenting himself with alledging it to be no coin, and exposing Mr. Walker's and Dr. Plot's notion of its being a Touch-piece.

MR. Thwaites, who follows next, has come the nearest the truth; but, as on one hand he takes it for a coin, which it is not, so on the other, he still persists in the old track of taking the G for a C, and likewise has overlooked two other letters. Moreover his interpretation has been so coldly received, so slighted by Mr. Wife, who seems entirely to dissent from him, that it may be thought necessary to do justice to Mr. Thwaites in certain particulars.

MR. Wife very justly holds it to be a jewel, and not a coin; but then, I think, he mistakes its use, and seems to doubt whether there be any inscription upon it; which I cannot but admire, since that is so evident in his own type.

WHAT I propose therefore to do, in regard to this dissonance of opinions, will be, first, to discover and explain the letters; secondly, to shew whose the head is; thirdly, to add a word of the age of the jewel; and fourthly, of the use for which it was originally designed.

FIRST then, this jewel is chased and repaired; for that side which is placed for the reverse in Mr. Wife's type (which I make use of here, esteeming it the most accurate) is the Intaglio, or the
concave

concave side, and the obverse is the convex. But the workmen very thoughtlessly (a fault too frequent in these rude and early times) wrought his draught or pattern the right way on the concave side, by which means every thing but one letter, namely the G, is inverted on the other.

THE margin, which is only ornament, seems to be entirely embossed, or the work of the chissel, there being no appearance of the work on the other side.

THE letters then on the convex side, where they are the fairest, are EGOVS $\text{\textcircled{U}}$; all which being inverted, when they are made to stand upright, are, EGO Δ S Ω , which I interpret “Ego Alpha “et Omega,” the A wanting the cross stroke, as is common, and the reversed S being an usual abbreviation of Et. Mr. Thwaites calls this the *little* character Σ , but I don’t know why, since it is of the size of the other letters. The character he deduces from the Anglo-Saxon, which is certainly very unnatural if it is to stand that way he gives it: But if it be reversed, as is alledged above, then it may probably be, that Anglo-Saxon character rounded at the corners, or rather that other mark $\bar{E}$, which he gives us, p. 182, so rounded. And it is certain, that upon the English coins, both gold and silver, from Edward III, to Edward VI, inclusive, the Σ or Et generally stands that way. Mr. Thwaites, moreover, overlooks two of the letters, the first and third, and takes the G for a C; but it is evidently a G in Mr. Wise’s plate; and the letters EGO are very conspicuous upon the jewel on the obverse or convex side, and I cannot but wonder he should miss them, and much more that Mr. Wise should dispute the existence both of them, and the rest of the letters, which, I think, must be undoubted by every body else.

THESE now are all the letters and characters I can perceive, the strokes preceding the E being intended for another purpose, as will appear hereafter.

THE head therefore, in the second place, is not an Angel, or the Blessed Virgin, or other holy woman, as has been supposed, but

but our Saviour. The legend plainly alludes to Rev. i. 8. and you may observe the cross placed before his face, and rays of glory (which at first sight some may take for letters), issuing from the dress or ornament of his head; for what Mr. Thwaites above calls a triple crown, is nothing else but an antique head dress, something like what we have on the coins of Burgred, King of Mercia, in whose territory the jewel was found. See Sir Andr. Fountaine's Tab. Burgred, N^o 17—23.

I WOULD willingly therefore, thirdly, refer the piece to the Mercian kingdom, the G being of a form sometimes used in that country (see my Dissertation on the Coin of Abp. Walstan) and to the reign of King Burgred, who was living when King Alfred came to the crown, and flourished in the middle of the ninth century. But if any gentleman, on account of the inscription A² Ω, would chuse to place it an hundred years later, when the allusion to that Apocalyptical description of our Saviour was much in vogue, namely, in the reign of Ethelred II, as appears from his money in Sir Andr. Fountaine's first plate, I will not greatly contest it with him. Whichever of these opinions is true, the jewel can have no relation to Edward the Confessor, and his pretended cures; but nevertheless, as there are certain holes in it for a silken string or small ruban to pass through, I think it highly probable, in the last place, that it was intended to be worn about the neck by way of ornament, or perhaps of an Amulet or charm, according to Mr. Thoresby. And this, I think, much more likely than the conjecture of Mr. Wise, that it was intended for the boss or ornament of a book, or some other piece of household furniture, by reason that the said holes are placed near together, and not opposite to one another, in different parts of the margin or border, which surely they would have been, had the jewel been intended to have been fastened to any other substance.

QUERE, whether this be not the oldest piece of chased work at this day extant?