

# REPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS.

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## REPORT

PRESENTED TO THE

**Cambridge Antiquarian Society,**

AT ITS THIRTY-NINTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

MAY 26, 1879,

WITH AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY,  
1878—1879.

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ALSO

**Communications**

MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

No. XXI.

BEING No. 3 OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

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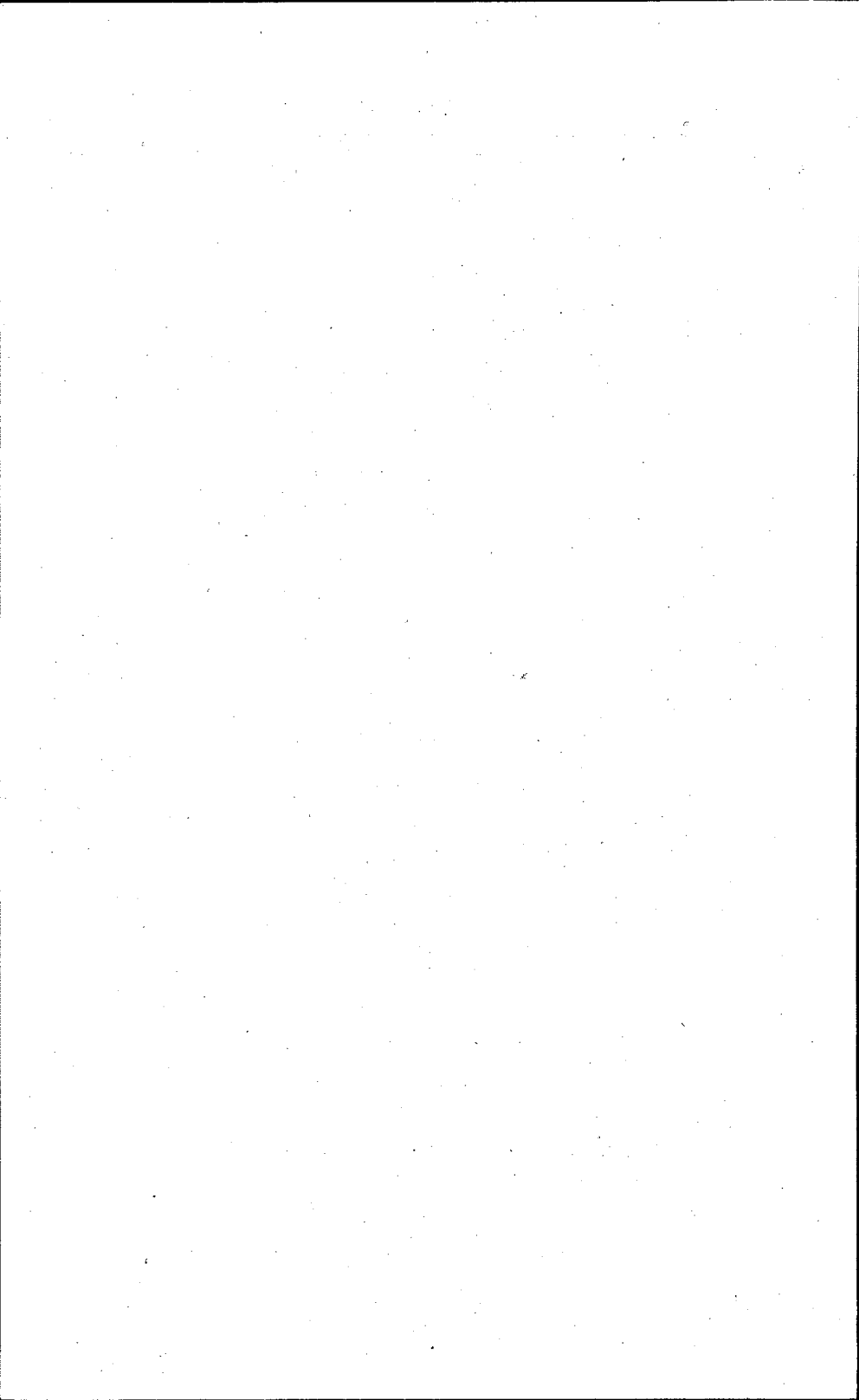
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1881

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CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN  
COMMUNICATIONS,

BEING

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE MEETINGS

OF THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society.

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No. XXI.

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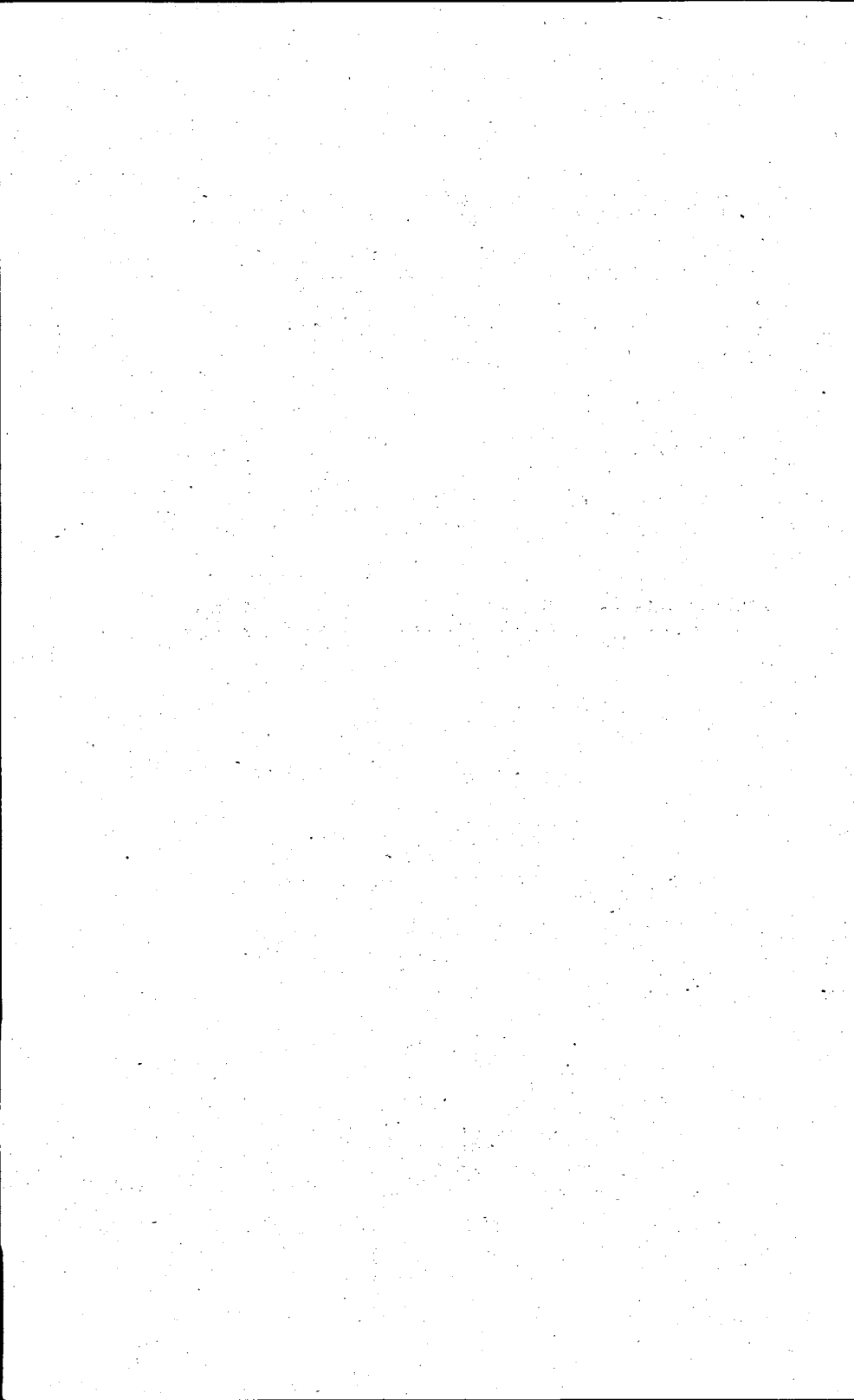
1878—1879.

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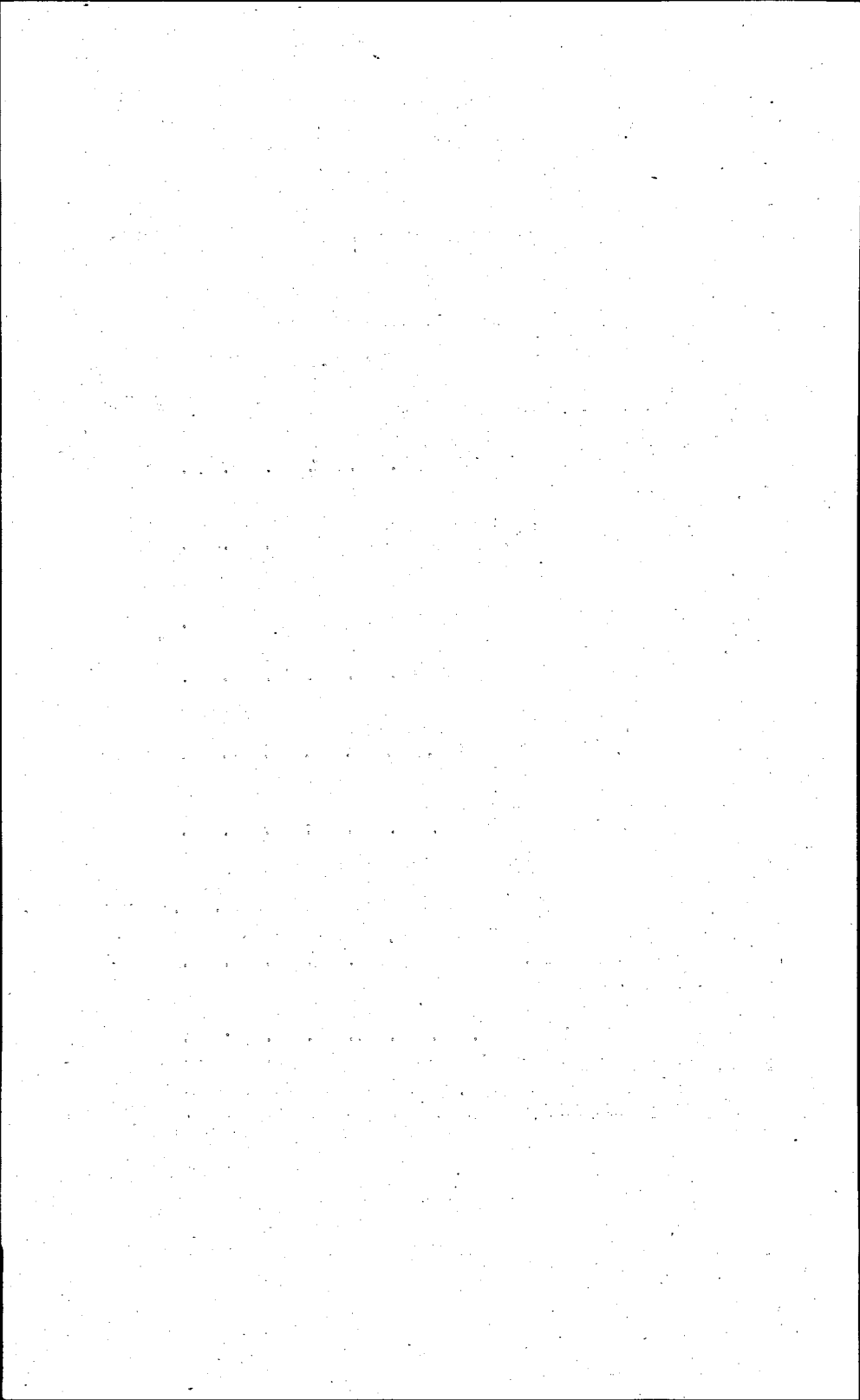
1881



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XXII. ON NINE ROMAN SIGNETS LATELY FOUND IN THE  
LEAD-MINES AT CHARTERHOUSE ON MENDIP. By the  
Rev. S. S. LEWIS, M.A., Corpus Christi College.

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[May 26, 1879.]

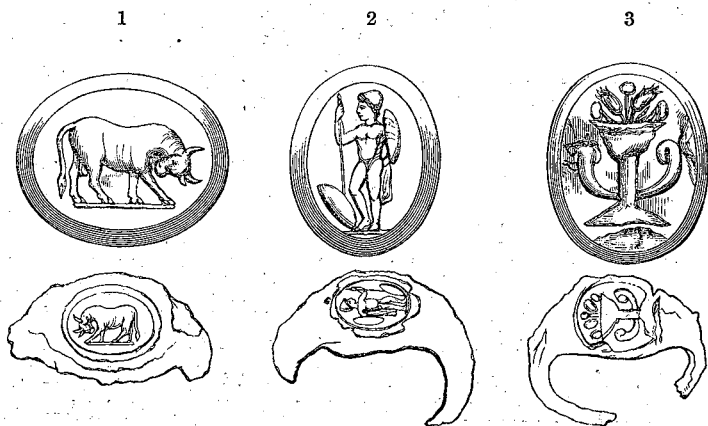
ON the bleak table-land of Somerset between the valley of the Avon northwards and that of the Parret which falls to Burnham on the south, the Carthusians of Witham had in the 14th century established a lonely cell. But ages earlier the moorland had been busy with a population of miners, smelters and engineers, all organized and governed by Roman prefects, whose very names we know not, but who have left us a curious legacy which tells many a lesson of art, romance and history. At Bruton, Blagdon and other neighbouring villages there have been found pigs of lead, the earliest of which<sup>1</sup>—found

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Yates "On the Mining Operations of the Romans," page 16 (*Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological Society*, Vol. VIII. 1859). See also the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* for June, 1875, and the Rev. H. M. Scarth in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*, Vol. VI. pages 187—191, and Vol. VII. pages 156—161.

at Wookey Hole in the time of Henry VIII.—bears the legend TI · CLAUDIVS · CAESAR · AVG · P · M · TRIB · P · VIII · IMP · XVI · DE BRITANN (thus fixing the date to 49 A.D.), and is now in the British Museum: at Charterhouse are preserved not only the gems which are the subject of the present pages, but also two pigs bearing the legend IMP · VESPASIAN · AVG ·, besides numerous *fibulae*, coins ranging from the Republic to Diocletian, and implements of bronze, lead and iron.

In each one of the nine gems engraved below lies a world of sentiment; but yet they were simply used as signets by a succession of inspectors, who ruled the hardworking serfs<sup>1</sup> centuries before the heather on the opposite hills of Wales had made way for the furnaces of Dowlais and Tredegar.

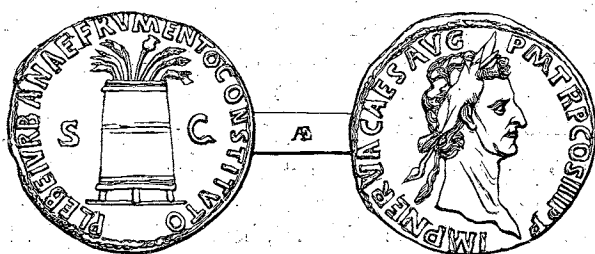
Of the three that have preserved their original iron settings No. 1 seems to be the earliest in date and the best



in design and execution; the material is sard, burnt white,

<sup>1</sup> "Ibi tributa et metalla et caeterae *servientium* poenae," Tacitus *Agr.* cap. XXXII. 7.

doubtless cremated with its Roman owner. The subject is a Butting Bull (*Taurus Cornupeta*), and closely recalls the reverse of one of the finest *aurei* struck by Augustus and imitated by the contemporary British king Tasciovanus: thus the gem may be dated to the beginning of the Empire. In No. 2, a Nicolo which retains its original polish, we see a warrior—perhaps the youthful god of war—with helmet, lance, and buckler; his cloak thrown carelessly backward and the enemy's abandoned shield at his feet seem to indicate a complete success, or at least the flight of the adversary. No. 3 is also a nicolo, bearing a very complicated design, which apparently contains wheat-ears and poppy-heads growing out of a basket that rests upon a *cippus*; from each side springs a cornu-copiae; symbols of rural prosperity which help us, by comparison with the sesterce of Nerva (from my own collection) given below, to find a clue to the meaning of this enigmatical gem.

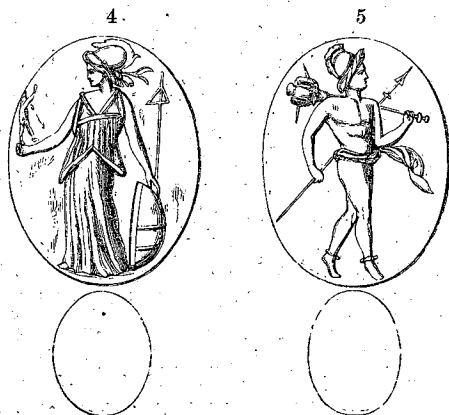


COIN OF NERVA.

*Obv.* Bust of Nerva laureated: IMP • NERVA • CAES • AVG • PM • TRP • COS III • S • C.  
The device and legend (PLEBEI • VRANAE • FRVMENTO • CONSTITVTO) on the reverse commemorate the organization of a regular supply of corn to the populace of Rome, A. D. 97.

On a denarius (A.D. 201) of Septimius Severus the same device is associated with the legend AFRICA.

Of the six that remain two (Nos. 4 and 5) are stones, and the rest pastes; upon No. 4, a dark carnelian, is to be seen the



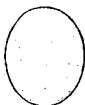
goddess *Roma* erect, still wearing her visored helmet, the left hand resting on the round heroic shield; her breastplate has been exchanged for the pacific *stola*; the lance stands at rest by her side; and on her right hand alights a winged Victory. The majesty and perfect repose of the whole composition recall some original in bronze or marble of Pallas Nikephoros, which a Mummius may have brought to Rome from conquered Hellas. The subject is frequently found on the coins of the Seleucidae, and was, we know, a favourite with the Emperor Domitian<sup>1</sup>, to whose time the engraving may be referred.

In the Mars Gradivus of No. 5, bearing in his right hand a lance, and in the left a trophy, we see a type of the impetuous god of war, which first appears on an *aureus* of Vitellius, and forms such a frequent and appropriate symbol on the coinage of Postumus and his "tyrannic" successors. The vigorous pace of the "Marching God" is cleverly indicated by the action of his feet: the stone is a dark-red jasper.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "*Pallada praetereo: res agit illa tuas*" (Martial ix. iv. 10). So Suetonius upon his institution of the *Quinquatria*. (*Domit. cap. iv*), and Dion Cassius LXVII. 1 A.

In No. 6 we come to one of those pastes by means of which

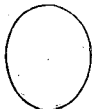
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(as with engravings and photographs in our own day) the less wealthy could supply themselves with faithful reproductions of the noblest works of art. The subject is a shepherd seated on a rock, and leaning on his staff as he rests under the shade of an olive tree; doubtless the signet of some Tityrus of the Mendip hills.

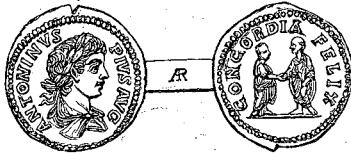
The three that follow are all nicolo pastes of but poor style, and still poorer preservation; yet they must not pass wholly unnoticed. No. 7 represents the old old story of

7



plighted youth and maid, and is the regular type of the Roman espousal-ring, as is seen in the elegantly set in-

taglio<sup>1</sup> which was found amongst the jewels of the hapless family of Diomedes in the cellars of his Pompeian villa. It was also a favourite subject on the coinage of Roman Emperors and Empresses of the third century: an example from a denarius of Caracalla (in the British Museum) is given below.



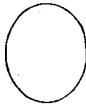
COIN OF CARACALLA.

*Obv.* Bust of Caracalla laureated and wearing the paludamentum and cuirass:  
ANTONINVS • PIVS • AVG.

The device and legend (CONCORDIA • FELIX) on the *reverse* indicate the espousals of Caracalla and Plautilla, A.D. 202. An aureus of this emperor bears the legend PROPAGO IMPERI around the same group.

The same device is borne by a nicolo in an antique gold setting, found near Florence, which is now in the exquisite collection of Mr C. D. E. Fortnum, and by a plasma in my own cabinet.

No. 8 presents to us some *rustica Phidyle*<sup>2</sup> offering first-fruits on the altar, while in her left hand she holds a cornu-copiae,



typical no doubt of the peace and plenty which result from

<sup>1</sup> See the remarks on espousal-rings in King's *Antique Gems and Rings*, vol. I. page 269, note \*.

<sup>2</sup> See Horace, *Carm.* III. xxiii. 2.

such an act of devotion. A similar subject, but of much finer execution, is found on a burnt sard in the Leake collection (case 11, no. 26) in the Fitzwilliam Museum. In No. 9 Mercury, messenger of Olympus, is seated<sup>1</sup> on a rock; his right hand holds a *caduceus*, his wand of office, while in the left<sup>2</sup> is the *crumena*, the purse which he bears as god of commerce. Winckelmann, commenting on a similarly engraved amethyst (No. 373) in the Stosch collection, acutely remarks that the pile of rock is in this case doubtless typical of a Promontory, and reminds us of the worship of Mercury as god of navigation also: in this aspect he was adored by the Sicyonians as ΕΡΜΗC ΕΠΑΚΤΙΟC. The addition of the twin serpents to the rod (given him originally by Apollo) marks a later style of art: they are said<sup>3</sup> to have been pacified by him, and thus their appearance on his wand marks him as the Herald of Peace. In this office, as also when he uses his rod as Guide of the passing spirit (*ψυχοπομπός*), and when he is portrayed bearing a ram on his shoulders (*κριοφόρος*), his character was most naturally appropriated by the Early Church to represent three several attributes of our Saviour. Indeed in early Greek mythology Hermes was the reliever of distress and the bestower of prosperity<sup>4</sup>, even more than the patron of athletics, commerce and speech.

Of Mercury three bronze statuettes have been found near Cambridge within the present century, of which one (from Barton, found in 1872) is in my own collection.

I would here offer my thanks to the Rev. H. M. Scarth, Prebendary of Wells, for much local information, and especially

<sup>1</sup> A rare posture for this active god; but such (M. de Villefosse reminds me) must have been the attitude of the colossal Mercury of the Arverni on the summit of the Puy de Dôme.

<sup>2</sup> This is reversed in the woodcut, which was taken from an impression.

<sup>3</sup> Hyginus ii. *Astron.* 7.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hom. *Il.* xvi. 185, xxiv. 360; *Odys.* viii. 335.

to Mr Rodgers, the manager of the lead-works which have been recently revived, for his kindness in giving me access to these interesting memorials of Roman occupation. Four signet-gems from the same spot were engraved and described in the abstract of this Society's Proceedings for 1877—1878; of these No. 2 has passed into my own cabinet, and Nos. 1, 3 and 4 are in the possession of Mr Collins, of Wrington.

Since these remarks were written, another gem, of which an engraving is subjoined, has been communicated to me by its owner, Mr Waldron of Llandaff, as having been found early in 1876 in the same excavations as the nine that are described above.

It is a red jasper, with the surface slightly impaired by a flake at the upper end; the subject of the intaglio is a goat, erect on his hind legs, doing his worst to an olive tree.



So he is represented on a terra-cotta lamp, from Cumae, in my own collection; and so Virgil<sup>1</sup> and Ovid<sup>2</sup> allude to him as loving to attack the vine.

<sup>1</sup> *Georgica* II. 380.

<sup>2</sup> *Fasti* I. 353—358.

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