

On an Ancient Gold Ring, found at Normanton-by-Derby.

BY ARTHUR COX, M.A.



THE ancient gold ring, of which an illustration (Plate XIV.) is here given, was found at Normanton, in the autumn of 1883.

The property known as Sinfin Lane Farm has been in one family since early in 1700; and it is only in the last generation that the name of Tabberer has died out for lack of male issue, and the farm has passed to the present owner, Mr. Wm. Gray, whose mother was a Tabberer.

It is to the courtesy of Mr. Gray, and to his readiness to lend me the ring and furnish all the information in his power, that I am indebted for the opportunity of giving these notes.

In September, 1883, Mr. Gray was proposing to enlarge some out-buildings in the field at the back of his house; in removing the soil, at a depth of about eighteen inches below the surface, the workman's pick struck and turned up this ring, thus bringing to light a most valuable and interesting relic of the past.

The ring lay perfectly loose in the soil; there were no old stones, nor foundations of any kind; no pottery, metal, nor bones near where it was found; in fact there would seem to be absolutely no explanation of the presence of the ring in that particular spot. The only discernable peculiarity of the "find" was, that the soil in which the ring lay, for about a square yard round, was



ANCIENT GOLD RING FOUND ON A FARM AT
NORMANTON BY DERBY.



SEAL AS TAKEN FROM THE RING.

of dark coloured earth, whereas the soil of the field beyond is common yellow clay.

The ring itself is of the purest gold, the workmanship very rude, the design—a roughly twisted cable widening into a flat round signet. The contrast, however, between the careless general design, and the engraving of the signet, is most marked. Nothing could be more exquisitely finished than the sharp details of the engraving, which is cut in the solid gold. The work is as fresh and clean as though executed yesterday. The device represents S. Michael, with shield and spear, trampling and transfixing the dragon; the minutest detail of features, feathers, or scales, being carved with a wondrous care and skill.

Thanks to the valuable information supplied by the work upon "Finger-ring Lore," by Mr. William Jones, F.S.A., to whom I have also had the advantage of submitting a wax impression of the ring; there is no hesitation in pronouncing it to be a religious or ecclesiastical ring, belonging to mediæval times. At first sight, the rudely executed design of the shank would almost suggest an earlier period for its production,* but comparison with other rings, and the unanimous opinion of several other good authorities who have been consulted, all lead to the same conclusion,—namely, that this ring was probably made early in the fourteenth century. It is a good specimen of the work of a good period, for, to quote from "Finger-ring Lore"—"It was in the middle ages, after a period of comparative mediocrity, that the greatest degree of perfection in goldsmiths' work, *especially in rings*, began to display itself."

After seeing the wax impression of our ring, Mr. Jones was inclined to pronounce the subject of the engraving to be S. George and the dragon, on the ground that the shield is that of S. George. Without presuming to dispute the opinion of so high an authority, I think I may venture to point out that the shield of S. Michael is often represented as bearing the cross usually attributed specially to

* Rock crystal was in use among the Romans for carving solid finger-rings, whose shanks were moulded into a twisted cable.

S. George. Indeed, according to Husenbeth, the best authority on Saints' Emblems, each bears a similar shaped red cross on a white ground ; and surely the very obvious wings displayed on the signet must belong to the Archangel rather than to the earthly warrior.

How a ring made for ecclesiastical use in the reign, probably, of Edward III., came to be lost in a field at Normanton-by-Derby, it is useless to speculate ; the fact remains that such a ring has been found there, and we may congratulate ourselves, and all lovers of archæology, that the discovery was made.

The ring weighs 7 dwt. 8 gs., and measures 3 inches round the outside, and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch across the hoop ; it would fit the index finger, or the third finger of an average sized man's hand.