

The Archaeological Journal.

JUNE, 1864.

ON A REMARKABLE INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF SAINT EDWARD THE CONFESSOR, WITH NOTICES OF CERTAIN RINGS HALLOWED ON GOOD FRIDAY BY THE SOVEREIGNS OF ENGLAND.

By EDMUND WATERTON, K.M., K. Ch., F.S.A.

FOR several centuries the Kings of England were wont to bless or to "hallow" certain rings, which were to be worn as of virtue against the cramp and the falling sickness. This appears to have been a custom exercised exclusively by the monarchs of England, and the last who so blessed cramp rings was Queen Mary.

The origin of this custom is obscure. The historians only state that the ring of Saint Edward the Confessor was kept for some time in Westminster Abbey, as a relic of the holy man;¹ that it was applied for curing the falling sickness; and that this practice led the succeeding Kings of England to bless rings on Good Friday against the cramp and epilepsy. This very meagre account is the only one given, and no reason is alleged why the former should have given rise to the latter practice.

The history of Saint Edward's ring is related by several writers, and is to be found in his various biographies.² After comparing the different versions, I have selected that given by Caxton in the "Golden Legend," which is as follows:—

"Whan the blessyd Kyng Edwarde had lyvid many yeres

¹ See Polydore Vergil, i. c. viii. p. 187; ed. 1649. Also Harpsfeld, sæc. xi. c. iii. p. 219; ed. 1622.

² See Alured Rivall. col. 397, Brompton, chron. 955. Also the French Metrical Life of St. Edward, dedicated to

Eleanor, Queen of Henry III., lately edited by Mr. Luard for the series of chronicles published under direction of the Master of the Rolls, p. 122; and the Latin Life of the Confessor in the Bodleian Library, *ibid.*, p. 373.

and was fallen in to grete age, it happed he came rydyng by a chyrche in Essexe, callyd Claverynge, whiche was at that tyme in halouynge, and sholde be dedycate in the honour of our lorde and saynt Johan the evangelyste. Wherefore the kyng, for grete devocyon, liichte downe, and taryed while the chyrche was in hallouynge : and in the time of processyon a fayre olde man came to the kyng and demaunded of hym almes in worship of God and Saint John Evangelyst. Thenne the kyng fonde noo thyng redy to gyve : ne his amener was not present, but took of the ryng fro his fynger and yave it unto the pour man : whom the pour man thanked and departed. And wythin certayn yeres after, ij pylgrymes of Englonde went in to the Holy Londe, for to visyte holy places there, and as they had lost theyr way, and were gone fro theyr felyship, and the nyghte approched, and they sorowed gretly as they that wyst not whyder to goo, and dred sore to be perysshid among wylde bestes. At the last they sawe a fayre companye of men arrayed in white clothyng, with two lyghtes born afore theym. And behynde theym there came a fayr auneynt man wyth white heer for age. Thenne thyse pylgryms thoughte to folowe the lyght and drewe nigh. Thenne the olde man axed them what they were, and of what regyon. And they answerde that they were pylgryms of Englonde and had lost theyr felyship and way also.

“ Thenne this olde man comforted theym goodly, and brought them in to a fayr cyte, where there was a fayre cenacle, honestli arrayed wyth all maner of deyntees. And whan they had well refresshid theym, and rested there all nyghte ; on the morne this fayr olde man wente wyth theym and broughte theym in the ryght waye agayne. And he was gladd to here theym talke of the welfare and holynesse of theyr Kyng Saynt Edwarde. And whan he sholde departe fro theym, thenne he tolde theym what he was, and sayd, I am JOHN thevangelyst, and say ye unto Edwarde your kyng, that I grete hym well, by the token that he gaaf to me this ryng wyth his owne hondes at the halowyng of my chirche, whiche ryng ye shall delyver to hym agayn. And say ye to hym that he dyspose his goodes. For wythin five monethes he shall be in the joye of heven wyth me, where he shall have his rewarde for his chastite and for his good lyvinge : And drede ye not for ye shall spede right

well in your journey, and ye shall come home in shorte tyme sauf and sounde. And whan he had delyverde to them the ryng he departed fro theym sodenly, and soon after they cam home and dyde theyr message to the kinge, and delyverde to hym the ryng, and sayd that John the Evangelyst sent it to hym. And as soone as he herde that name he was ful of joye, and for gladnes lete falle teres fro his eyen, givynge lawde and thankyng to Almyghty God, and to Saynt John his avowry that he wolde vouchesauf to lete him have knowlege of his departyng out of this worlde.

“ Also he had a nother token of Saynte John, and that was that the two pilgrimes sholde deye before him, whiche thing was provyd true, for they lyvid not longe after. And at the fest of Crystmasse the kyng was seke, and on the day of thynnocentes he herde masse in the newe Chirche of Westmestre, which he had new reedefyed, and theene he, givynge thankinges unto Almyghty God, retourned in to his chamber sore seke, there abidyng the mercy of our Lorde.”³

Of the history of this ring there are two accounts ; one is, that the Confessor in his last illness gave the ring which he wore to the Abbot of Westminster. Such is the statement of Alban Butler, who says that it is so related by William Caxton, in the reign of Henry VI., in his MS. Chronicle of England.⁴ There is a belief that Havering, in the parish of Hornchurch in Essex, was so called from having this ring, but there is no foundation for the statement. One of the royal hunting-seats in Waltham Forest was called the Bower, and Saint Edward was dwelling there when the pilgrims delivered the ring to him. Another account alleges that from that time this royal hunting-seat was called Havering-atte-Bower. Morant is inclined to derive the name from the Saxon *hæfer*, a goat, and *ing*, pasture ;—the goat’s feeding place, or pasture ;⁵ but Caxton, in the Golden Legend, calls this place Claverynge.⁶ At Romford, which appears to have been the parish church of Hornchurch, the history of this ring was represented in stained glass, and the king was figured with these words underneath :—“ *Johannes per peregrinos misit Regi Edwardo . . .*” When Dart wrote his History of Westminster Abbey, the statues of Saint

³ Golden Legend, Caxton, f. cccviii.

⁴ Butler, Lives of the Saints, vol. x.
p. 654.

⁵ Morant’s Essex. vol. ii. p. 58.

⁶ Golden Legend, *ut supra*.

Edward and the pilgrims were, according to his statement, over the Courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas in Westminster Hall, and over the gate going into the Dean's Yard. The story is also wrought in bas-relief in the Abbey Church of Westminster, in the chapel where Saint Edward's relics lie at the back of the screen which divides them from the altar.⁷ It was also embroidered in the hangings of the choir, with these verses under the figures of Saint John and Saint Edward :—

“ Villibus in pannis mendicat imago Johannis,
Rex dat ei munus : donum fecit annulus unus.
Annulus iste datus mittente Johanne relatus
Regi scire moram vitæ dat mortis et horam.”

The same subject, according to Caxton's Chronicle, was represented in a window in the south aisle, next to that over the door leading into the west side of the cloisters ; underneath the figures were these verses :—

“ Rex cui nil aliud presto fuit, accipe, dixit,
Annulum, et ex digito detrahat ille suo.
. . . Evangelist . . . villa Johannis
. gratia petit.”⁸

Prefixed to an abbreviated copy of the Domesday Book in the Public Record Office, are three pages, each containing two representations of incidents in the life of the Confessor, as described by Abbot Ailred. The earlier years of the thirteenth century may be assigned as the period of their execution, but they are earlier than any of the architectural or other representations previously referred to. The last of these illuminations represents St. John, in the habit of a pilgrim, receiving the King's present, and it is described by a quotation from the biographer (p. 397) — “De annulo quem sanctus Rex beato Johanni Evangeliste dedit et quomodo eundem receperit.” A woodcut of this interesting delineation, to which my attention has been called by our obliging friend Mr. Burt, accompanies this memoir. Another remarkable illustration of the same subject occurs in the MS. Life of the Confessor, in the Public Library at Cambridge, written about 1245.

⁷ These curious series of subjects of the Confessor's life are figured in Carter's Sculpture and Painting in England : the incidents here referred to are

to be found in pl. liv. p. 98, edit. 1838.

⁸ Dart, Antiqu. of Westm., vol. i. p. 50.

At his coronation Edward II. offered a pound of gold wrought into a figure representing Saint Edward holding a ring, and a mark of gold, or eight ounces, worked into the figure of a pilgrim putting forth his hand to receive the ring.

It appears, however, that Saint Edward's ring was deposited with his corpse in the tomb. His translation took place on the third of the ides of October (Oct. 13), A.D. 1163, seventy-seven years after his burial. This solemn ceremony was performed at midnight, and on opening his coffin the body was found to be incorrupt. On this occasion the Abbot Lawrence took from the body of the sainted king his robes and the ring of Saint John; of the robes the abbot made three copes, as appears from the following entry in the catalogue of the relics of the Saint. The abbot also gave the ring to the abbey.—“Dompnus Laurentius quondam abbas hujus loci sed et annulo ejusdem (Sancti Edwardi) quem Sancto Johanni quondam tradidit, quem et ipse de paradiso remisit, elapsis annis duobus et dimidio, postea in nocte translationis de digito regis tulit, et pro miraculo in loco isto custodiri jussit.” The same MS. contains the indulgences to be gained by those who visited the holy relics:—“Ad annulum Sancti Edwardi vj. ann. iijc.xi. dies.”⁹ No further mention has been found of Saint Edward's ring.

The precise date when the Kings of England commenced to bless rings regarded as preservatives against the cramp, or against epilepsy, the *morbis Sancti Johannis*, is uncertain. The earliest mention of the practice which I have found occurs in the reign of Edward II.

It appears that on Good Friday, when the King went to adore the cross, he was wont to make an offering of money; that the money so offered was redeemed by a sum of equivalent value; and that the money so redeemed was converted into rings, which were then “hallowed” by the king. The prayer used in the blessing of the rings implores—“ut omnes qui eos gestabunt, nec eos infestet vel nervorum contractio, vel comitialis morbi periculum.” And the King, to impart this salutary virtue, rubbed the rings between his hands, with this invocation,¹—“Manuum nostrarum confrica-

⁹ De fundacione ecclesie Westm., by Ric. Sporley, a monk of the Abbey, A.D. 1450: MSS. Cott. Claud. A. viii. ff. 32,

33.

¹ Anstis, Hist. of the Garter, vol. i. p. 223.

tione quas olei sacri infusione externa sanctificare dignatus es pro ministerii nostri modo consecra," &c.

Hitherto these rings are simply described as *annuli*. But in the 44th of Edward III., in the account book of John de Ipre, or Ypres, they are termed *medicinales*.

In the last chapter of the constitutions of the Household settled in the reign of Edward II., the following entry appears:—"Item le Roi doit offrir de certain le jour de grant vendredi a crouce v.s. queux il est acustumez recevoir devers lui a la mene le chapelein afaire ent anulx a *donner pur medicine* az divers gentz."

In the Eleemosyna Roll of 9th Edward III. the following entry occurs:—"In oblacione domini Regis ad crucem de Gneythe die parasceves in capella sua infra mannerium suum de Clipstone, in precium duorum florencium de Florencia, xiiij. die Aprilis, vi.s. viij.d., et in denariis quos posuit pro dictis florenciis reassumptis *pro annulis medicinalibus inde faciendis*, eodem die, vi.s.; summa xii.s. viii.d." ²

In the Eleemosyna Roll of 10th Edward III. we have the following entry:—"In oblacione domini Regis ad crucem de Gneyth in die parasceves apud Eltham, xxix. die Marci v.s., et pro iisdem denariis reassumptis pro annulis inde faciendis per manus Domini Johannis de Crokeford eodem die, v.s." And in the following year:—"In oblacione domini regis ad crucem de Gneyth in capella sua in pcho de Wyndesore die parasceves v.s., et pro totidem denariis reassumptis pro annulis inde faciendis, v.s." ³

In the accounts of John de Ypres, 44th Edward III., the following entries are found:—"In oblacionibus Regis factis adorando crucem in capella sua infra castrum suum de Wyndesore die parasceves in pretio trium nobilium auri et quinque solidorum sterling', xxv.s.—In denariis solutis pro iisdem oblacionibus reassumptis pro annulis medicinalibus inde faciendis, ibidem, eodem die, xxv.s."

The same entries occur in the 7th and 8th Henry IV.

In the 8th Edward IV. mention occurs that these cramp rings were made of silver and of gold, as appears by the following entry:—"Pro eleemosyna in die parasceves c. marc. et pro annulis de auro et argento pro eleemosyna Regis eodem die," &c. And a Privy Seal of the next year,

² MSS. Cott. Nero, C. viii. f. 209.

³ Ibid. ff. 212, 213, b.

amongst other particulars, enumerates,—“Item, paid for the King's Good Fryday rings of gold and silver, xxxiii. *l.* vi. s. viii. *d.*”

Mention of these rings is also found in the Comptroller's accounts in the 20th Henry VII.

A MS. copy of the Orders of the King of England's Household, 13th Henry VIII., 1521-22, preserved in the Imperial Library at Paris (No. 9986), contains “the order of the Kinge's of England, touching his coming to service, hallowing y^e crampe rings, and offering and creeping to the crosse.”⁴

“First the king to come to the closett or to the chappell with the lords and noblemen wayting on him, without any sword to bee borne before him on that day, and there to tarry in his travers till the bishop and deane have brought forth the crucifix out of the vestry (the almoner reading the service of the crampe rings) layd upon a cushion before the high altar, and then the huishers shall lay a carpet before y^t for y^e king to creepe to the crosse upon: and y^t done, there shall be a fourme set upon the carpet before the crucifix, and a cushion layd before it for the king to kneele on; and the Master of the jewell house shal be ther ready with the crampe rings in a basin or basins of silver; the king shall kneele upon the sayd cushion before the fourme, and then must the clerke of the closett bee ready with the booke conteyninge y^e service of the hallowing of the said rings, and the almoner must kneel upon the right hand of the king, holding of the sayd booke, and when y^t is done the king shall rise and go to the high altar, where an huisher must be ready with a cushion to lay for his grace to kneele upon, and the greatest Lord or Lords being then present shall take the basin or basins with the rings and bear them after the king, and then deliver them to the king to offer; and this done the queen shall come down out of her closett or travers into the chappell with ladies and gentlewomen wayters on her, and creepe to the crosse; and that done she shall returne againe into her closett or travers, and then the ladies shall come downe and creepe to the crosse, and when they have done, the Lords and noblemen shall in likewise.”⁵

⁴ Cited in an interesting notice of Orders of the Royal Household, *z.* Hen. VIII., *Gent. Mag.* vol. i. N. S. p. 48.

quoted in the notice of crampe-rings by Mr. Stevenson. *Gent. Mag.* vol. i. N. S. 1834, p. 49.

⁵ *Cod. Bibl. Imp. Paris*, no. 9986;

Chancellor Fortescue uses an argument which shows that the sanative virtue of these rings was held, as in the above-mentioned ritual, to be derived from the anointing of the king's hands with the sacred chrism at the coronation. In his defence of the House of Lancaster, he says,—“Item Regibus Angliæ regali ipso officio plura incumbunt, quæ naturæ muliebri adversantur;” then, after setting forth the cure of the king's evil, he proceeds,—“Item aurum et argentum sacris unctis manibus Regum Angliæ in die Paschæ” (it should have been in die Parasceves), “divinorum tempore quemadmodum Reges Angliæ annuatim facere solent, tactum devote et oblatum, spasmodicos et caducos curant quemadmodum per annulos ex dicto auro seu argento factos et digitis hujusmodi morbidorum impositos multis in mundi partibus crebro usu expectum est. Quæ gratia Reginis non conferatur, cum ipsæ in manibus non ungantur.”⁶

These cramp rings hallowed by the Kings of England were celebrated throughout Europe, and were in great repute. Lord Berners, the translator of Froissart, when ambassador to Charles V., writing to “my Lorde Cardinal's grace from Saragoza, the xxi. daie of June,” 1510, says—“If your grace remember me with some crampe rynges ye shall do a thynge muche looked for, and I trust to bestow thaym well, with Godd's grace, who evermor preserve and encrease your moste reverent astate.”⁷

The Emperor's jewel case, according to Mr. Stirling, was, as might be supposed, rather miscellaneous than valuable in its contents, amongst which were various charms, such as the bezoar stone against the plague, and gold rings from England against the cramp.⁸

A letter from Dr. Thomas Magnus, Warden of Sibthorpe College, Nottinghamshire, to Cardinal Wolsey, written in 1526, contains the following curious passage:—“Pleas it your Grace to wete that M. Wiat of his goodnes sent unto me for a present certaine cramp ringges, which I distributed and gave to sondery myne acquaintaunce at Edinburghe, amonges other to M. Adame Otterbourne, who, with oone of thayme, releved a mann lying in the falling sekenes, in the sight of myche people; sethenne whiche tyme many requestes have been made unto me for cramp ringges, at

⁶ Anstis, *ut supra*.

⁷ MS. Harl. 295, f. 119, cited in Gent.

Mag. vol. i. N. S. p. 50.

⁸ Cloister Life of Charles V., p. 109.

my departing there, and also sethenne my comyng frome thennes. May it pleas your Grace therefore to show your gracious pleasure to the said M. Wyat, that some ringges may be kept and sent into Scottelande ; whiche after my poore oppynnyoun shulde be a good dede, remembering the power and operacion of thaym is knowne and proved in Edinburgh, and that they be gretly required for the same cause both by grete personnages and other."⁹

From a passage in Burnet's History of the Reformation it appears that Henry VIII. ceased to hallow cramp rings after he was declared to be the head of the Church of England as by law established. Burnet says—"When he (Gardiner) went to Rome, in the year 1529, Anne Boleyn writ a very kind letter to him, which I have put in the Collection (Records, No. 24). By it, the reader will clearly perceive that he was then in the secret of the King's designing to marry her as soon as the divorce was obtained. There is another particular in that letter, which corrects a conjecture which I had set down in the beginning of the former book concerning the cramp rings that were blessed by King Henry, which I thought might have been done by him after he was declared head of the Church. That part was printed before I saw this letter ; but this letter shows they were used to be blessed before the separation from Rome ; for Anne Boleyn sent them as great presents thither. This use of them had been (it seems) discontinued in King Edward's time ; but now, under Queen Mary, it was designed to be revived, and the office for it was written out in a fair manuscript yet extant, of which I have put a copy in the Collection (No. 25). But the silence in the writers of that time makes me think it was seldom if ever practised."¹

In a letter from Gardiner (1547), written to Ridley, who had preached against images, is this passage :—"The late King used to bless cramp rings both of gold and silver which were much esteemed every where, and when he was abroad they were often desired from him. This gift he hoped the young king would not neglect. He believed the invocation of the name of God might give such a virtue to holy water as well as to the water of baptism."²

⁹ MSS. Cott. Calig. B. ii., fol. 115 (formerly 112), cited by Mr. Stevenson, *Gent. Mag.* vol. i. N. S. p. 50.

¹ Burnet's *Hist. of the Reformation*,

vol. ii. p. 664, ed. 1829. *Collection of Records*, No. 25. *Miss Strickland's Lives of the Queens of England*, vol. iv. p. 205.

² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Queen Mary (whose hands were anointed at her coronation) revived the blessing of the cramp rings, as well as the touching for the king's evil; and her illuminated Manual, which she used on these occasions, is now in the possession of Cardinal Wiseman. By the kind permission of His Eminence I was enabled to submit this precious MS. to the inspection of the Institute.

On the second leaf of the MS. the service for the blessing of the rings begins with this rubric:—

“Certeyne Prayers to be used by the Queenes Heighnes in the Consecracion of the Cramperings.”

The next rubric is as follows:—“The Ryngs lyeng in one bason or moo, this Prayer shall be said over them,” &c. This is followed by the “*Benedictio Annulorum*,” consisting of several short formulæ and sentences. Then another rubric sets forth:—

“These Prayers beinge saide, the Queenes Heighnes rubbeth the Rings betwene her handes, sayinge *Sanctifica Domine Annulos*,” &c.

“Thenne must holly water be caste on the rings, sayeng, ‘*In nomine Patris et filii et spiritus sancti*,’ Amen.” Followed by two other prayers.

This Formula is printed by Burnet.³

Miss Strickland claims the blessing of the cramp rings as the peculiar privilege of the Queens of England.⁴ But her argument falls to the ground when tested by collateral and official documents. It is to this effect,—that the other Queens of England must have blessed them, because Queen Mary did so.

This is the evidence which I have been able to collect concerning the blessing of cramp rings by the sovereigns of England. Cramp rings of another sort may form the subject of a memoir on a future occasion. I regret that I am unable to accompany this essay on royal cramp rings by the representation of any example, but I have never met with a spe-

³ History of the Reformation. Vol. ii. p. 266 of Records, Book ii. no. xxv. “Ex MS. in Biblioth. R. Smith, Lond.” The possessor of this precious volume at that period was, it is believed, the titular Bishop of Chalcedon; the MS. now in the library of Cardinal Wiseman, to which reference has been made in this memoir, is apparently the

same from which Burnet printed the formula.

⁴ Lives of the Queens of England, vol. iv. p. 206. In Tytler's Letters from the State Paper Office the envoys of Queen Mary request that some newly-hallowed cramp rings should be sent for distribution.

cimen that could, with any certainty, be pronounced a royal cramp ring; neither have I found any description of the rings made, as the entries state, from the gold and silver coins offered by the King on Good Friday, and then redeemed by an equivalent sum. Probably they were plain hoop rings. In the will of John Baret, of Bury St. Edmunds, 1463, a bequest is made to "my lady Walgrave" of a "rowund ryng of the kynges silvir." In another part of his will he bequeaths to "Thomais Brews, esquier, my crampe ryng with blak innamel, and a part silvir and gilt." And, in 1535, Edmund Lee bequeaths to "my nece Thwarton my gold ryng w^t a turkes, and a crampe ryng of gold w^t all."⁵

But there is no evidence to show that the second ring mentioned by John Baret was a royal cramp ring; whereas it appears to me that the one bequeathed by Edmund Lee may have been one of the royal cramp rings, for otherwise a more particular description would have been given.

⁵ Bury Wills, p. 35, edited for the Camden Society by Mr. Tymms, pp. 35, 41, 127.