

VI.—AN UNKNOWN PERCY MEDAL.

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[Read on the 26th October, 1887.]



Obv.—Bust of first Duke of Northumberland to r., draped, hair flowing in ringlets upon the shoulder. Legend,—HU PERCY DUKE OF NOR. In the exergue : IOHN KIRK F

Rev.—The supper at Emmaus.¹ Copper. Size 1·625. Weight 1 oz. 13 dwts. Cast and chased. Unique. By John Kirk.

THIS medal was brought to me some time ago by a collector in Carlisle, with a request that I would tell him what it was intended to commemorate. He was unable to tell me how the medal came into his possession.

I brought the medal over to Newcastle, expecting to find a duplicate in the Museum in the Black Gate. In this I was disappointed, nor could any of the local collectors, to whom Mr. Blair kindly referred me, produce one or tell me anything about it. Under these circumstances I sent, first a cast in gutta and then the medal

¹ “The supper at Emmaus occurs on an ivory plaque of the 10 cent. in the *Kunst Kammer* at Berlin (Westwood’s *Catalogue*, No. 186); and in a 12 cent. Psalter, in British Museum (Nero C. iv.), there are only two disciples, Cleophas, and another traditionally supposed to be S. Peter.”—Romilly-Allen’s *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 306.—ED.

itself, to Lord Percy, who showed it to the Duke of Northumberland. Nothing like it exists in the collections at Alnwick Castle, nor does the Duke know anything about it. By Lord Percy it was taken to the medal room at the British Museum, where it was utterly unknown, though at once recognised as the work of John Kirk, whose signature, very faint indeed, is in the exergue. John Kirk was a pupil of James Anthony Dassier, who was appointed Chief Engraver to the Mint in 1740, having previously been Assistant Engraver. Kirk executed a large number of medals and medalets and received several premiums from the Society of Arts. He lived in St. Paul's Churchyard and died there 27th November, 1776. As the dukedom was created in 1766, we thus get the date of the medal to within 10 years.

The bust of the first duke is, I am assured by Dr. Bruce, an admirable likeness. The abbreviation of HU for HUGH, and NOR for NORTHUMBERLAND are curious.

The treatment of the supper at Emmaus is peculiar. A square table occupies the centre of the field of the *reverse*, covered with two cloths one over the other. The two disciples, grave and bearded men, are seated at the table; one apparently sleeping with his eyes downcast; the other has his arms outstretched in an attitude of astonishment, and his face turned upwards towards the Saviour, who vanishes by rising from his seat into the air over the table, his draperies flying loose about him. The second disciple has a long staff, with scrip attached, across his knees, and another staff and scrip and cloak lie on the ground; a folding stool, and a wine cooler, in which are two bottles, are in front of the table; on the table a dish or two remain, and in the background a servant is removing another. Over the shoulder of the disciple, who has his eyes downcast, appears what seems like the tip of a wing, but is, I think, intended for his hat, suspended on his back.

Thinking it possible that this composition might be inspired by some celebrated painting, I ventured to send a sketch to Sir Frederick Burton, the Director of the National Gallery, from whom I received the following most courteous reply:—

‘MY DEAR SIR,

AUG. 23, 1887.

From the sketch of the reverse of the medal enclosed in your letter I would venture to say that the medallist could not have taken the composition from any celebrated picture by one of the Old Masters. The design belongs to a late

period of Art—to the late eclectic time—I should say not earlier than, if so early as, the middle of the XVII. century. It would be hard to say from the sketch, which gives only the general composition, where it was designed, and medallists of the XVII. and early XVIII. centuries did not, I think, generally consider the laws which should regulate the treatment of a work in relief, but sought rather to make their work pictorial.

At any rate I am pretty sure that the original of the design in question would not be found amongst the pictures of any one of the great 'Old Masters.'

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Believe me, very truly yours,

F. W. BURTON.

What is the connection between the *obverse* and the *reverse* of this medal is not obvious. It is probable that it is a trial piece only, and that no more were ever made. It may have been intended to commemorate the laying of the foundation stone of some charity.