XIV.—A GOLD FEDE-RING BROOCH. ENGLISH OF FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

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Fede-rings received their name because of the two hands clasped in troth, which form a conspicuous part of their design. They descend from Roman times[1] and fede finger rings formed one of the most extensive sub-divisions of mediæval betrothal and marriage rings.

But mediæval fede-ring brooches are rare. There are only three examples in the British Museum, two of gold and one of silver.[2]

The example under consideration (plate LVI, figs. 1 and 2) was presented to the society at its annual meeting, January, 1930, by Dr. Ranken Lyle, who had acquired it at the Chesters sale in that month. It was no. 1554 in the catalogue and is there described as of fourteenth century date. A consensus of expert opinion, however, places it in the fifteenth century. Its history has not been traced, though it is said that it was found near Lanercost.

It is 1⅝ inches in diameter, and weighs ·95 oz. Troy.

The design of the ring represents two pairs of arms with hands clasped; there are frilled cuffs at the wrists and the right hands are placed in the left sleeves and

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[1] F. H. Marshall's catalogue of Roman finger rings in the British Museum, 1907, p. xxii.

[2] All English. The two gold examples are inscribed and the hands clasp a heart. That of silver is from the Bernal collection, no. 1316.

FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.

GOLD FEDE-RING BROOCH.

vice versa.[3] Upon the four sleeves is a black letter inscription, on the front (plate LVI, fig. 1) :

to þe iþe/u my trought I plight

and on the back (plate LVI, fig. 2) :

and to þe mary his moder bright.

The background of the lettering is roughened to give a key to the enamel, which is now entirely missing,[4] as is also the pin. The pin was hinged in the nick cut through the word iþe/u—probably there was S upon the head of the pin. The point of the pin rested in the nick between the words I and plight, thus the hinge of the pin was at the junction of the upper pair of arms, and the point at the junction of the lower pair. The clasped hands have an undercut hollow space between the palms of each pair, and, except for the missing pin and enamel, the brooch is in mint condition, being as fine an example of an English fede-ring brooch[5] as has come down to us.

Mediæval brooches were by no means always used as a fastener of the costume, but were also used for decoration : the larger on the hat, the smaller on the sleeve, or elsewhere. Henry VIII had three hundred and twenty-four brooches.[6]

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[3] A sixteenth century silver fede-ring brooch, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 129, 1864, has four right hands and no left hands.

[4] A background of dark coloured enamel would render the lettering more legible.

[5] Two fede-ring brooches were in the Rosenburg sale at Berlin, November, 1929; one, no. 141d in the catalogue, is similar in design to that under consideration. I am indebted to Mr. A. B. Tonnochy, M.A., of the British Museum, for this reference.

[6] *Jewellery*, by H. Clifford Smith, p. 267.