

#### INSCRIBED RUNIC RING.

The bronze ring inscribed with Runic characters, presented to the Society, was found in the year 1849, in the Abbey Park, in the immediate neighbourhood of St Andrews. It is a large Bronze Finger-Ring inscribed on the two faces in Anglo-Saxon Runes, and is of peculiar interest, as being, it is believed, the only example of the Palæography of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers hitherto found in Scotland, with the single, but most important exception of the noble Monument at Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire.

It may not perhaps be possible to make more of the present inscription, beyond the simple, yet not unimportant fact that the characters are Anglo-Saxon, and not Scandinavian Runes. Those on the one face read apparently  $\mathfrak{A} \mathfrak{I} \mathfrak{K} \mathfrak{H} \mathfrak{I}$ . The other face presents only five straight lines, all distinctive details being defaced, possibly it should only be regarded as a signet ring inscribed with the owner's name—irrecoverable now in the mutilated state of the inscription. Some little notice however, of similar relics will shew that it may have originally possessed greater significance and value.

The ideas popularly attached to Runes in this country have long been of the vaguest and most erroneous sort. We have adopted in Scotland, even into its antiquarian nomenclature, the term *Runic Knot*, using it as nearly synonymous with Scandinavian, and thereby manifesting ignorance of the fact that our own Anglo-Saxon ancestors actually employed a Runic alphabet, and have left MSS., graven monuments, and relics, such as the one now submitted to the Society, inscribed in these ancient characters.

But even when, with greater accuracy, we employ the term Runes, as signifying an alphabet, or set of alphabets, we fall short of its original meaning. The word *Rune* properly signified among the Germanic nations, *a secret, a mystery*; while *Runa* denoted *a whisperer, a magician*. Runes, in fact, pertained exclusively to the priestly order of the old pagan tribes of Germany, from the earliest periods of which we have any knowledge of them; and their original mysterious character, as pertaining to the most secret rites of the priest and magician, was never lost sight of. Hence they were regarded among the forbidden and diabolical adjuncts of pagan sorcery by the first Christian missionaries, and were everywhere supplanted by the Greek or Latin characters so soon as Christianity triumphed over the older pagan creeds.

The ideas of magical potency however, thus attached to the old pagan characters, led them to be preserved among the charms of medieval superstition, and

various Runic rings have been found obviously designed for use as amulets or charms. It is well known that much of the ancient healing art was held to consist in the use of similar charms. Marcellus for example, a physician of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, prescribes, as the cure for a pain in the side, that the patient shall wear a gold ring, inscribed with certain characters. It is to be placed on the finger of the hand on the same side as the pain is felt, and to be worn on a Thursday at the decrease of the moon. It was indeed a favourite mode of applying prescriptions by means of the finger-ring. A physician of the fourth century prescribes as the cure for epilepsy a ring set with a portion of an elk's hoof; while it may be worth noting that on the same authority an infallible cure for conjugal debility, is the paring of an ass's hoof worn in the finger-ring! Medieval inscribed rings are of common occurrence bearing the sacred names IESVS, MARIA; IESVS · NASARENVS, and other favourite names, or words of power, such as those of the three magi, *Gaspar, Melchior, and Baltazar*. These were worn as preservatives against plague and other contagious diseases, and it was no doubt for the same reason that brooches were similarly inscribed. A gold ring set with a coarse blood-stone found a few years since, when laying gas pipes in St Mary Wynd, Edinburgh, and acquired by the late C. K. Sharpe, Esq., bears the inscription in characters of the fourteenth century,

**God · help · wit · Maria.**

Another ring in the same collection may be mentioned here though of a different character. It is a broad hoop of gold, with the inscription in two lines inverted so that the tops of the letters are toward each other. It was found near Elcho, on the banks of the Tay, and must have belonged to a nun. The characters are at least a century earlier than the former. The inscription is:

**✠ · ces · anel · de · chastate · seu · expose · atn · Iesu · Crist.**

While we smile at the memorials of the credulity of past ages, it may be well to remember that the modern zinc ring worn as a cure for rheumatism, under some vague idea that an electric current is sustained by such means, though thus set off with a show of scientific reasoning, is not a whit better than the talismanic rings and other nostrums of medieval empiries.

The Arabian physicians dealt in similar charms, usually inscribed in Cufic characters; and the wild Eastern fictions, as well as many of the Rabbinical fables, abound with stories about the power of Solomon's Magic Ring, and other amulets of like kind. Nor were such ideas confined to charlatans and empiries. Even Galen recommends a ring set with jasper, to be worn in certain cases as an infallible preventive of disease. In the *Plutus* of Aristophanes, the just man is represented as replying to a threat of the Sycophant, that he

cares nothing for him, as he has acquired a charm from one who sold medicated rings, effectual against all influence of demons, serpents, vipers, &c. On this Carion the servant sarcastically expresses a doubt if the charmed ring will be effectual against the bite of a *Sycophant*.

Referring again to the use of *Runes* as charms : Hicke has engraved in his Thesaurus, various small circular pieces of gold or silver, inscribed with Runic characters, and believed by him to have been used as amulets. In 1824, Mr Wm. Hamper exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries of London a jasper ring, inscribed in Anglo-Saxon Runes, with a rhyming triplet, which may be translated :

Raise us from the dust,  
Our pains arest,  
Though the grave lust.

This he pronounces to have been an amulet against the plague.

Another gold ring inscribed in Anglo-Saxon Runes, found in 1817 in the neighbourhood of Carlisle, is in the possession of the Earl of Aberdeen. It has been read,

In Fever or leprosy  
Fear not for Death.

A third, found in Yorkshire, and engraved in Drake's *Eboracum*, bore the same inscription, with only a variation in the spelling of one of the words. The design of these as curative charms is obvious.

Two other rings are known to have been found in England, both inscribed in Anglo-Saxon Runes ; but, as Kemble has remarked, " certainly not in Anglo-Saxon, or any cognate tongue." This, however, need not surprise us. The same able Anglo-Saxon scholar has produced various interesting examples of the colophons of early MSS., inscribed in the Latin tongue, but in Anglo-Saxon Runes ; and indeed the probability of any regular alphabet being applicable to the writing of various languages, appears to be almost too obvious a truism to be stated, were it not a fact that the use of Runes has been repeatedly assumed as an infallible proof of an inscription being in the old Norse or Icelandic language, as in the well-known example of the Ruthwell Cross, and also in the inscription of the Hunterston Brooch.