

A PENNY OF ÆTHELRED, SUB-REGULUS OF MERCIA,  
SON-IN-LAW OF ÆLFRED THE GREAT.

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**I** AM not unaware that in attributing a coin to Æthelred, the great ealdorman and sub-regulus of Mercia, I am putting forward a view opposed to what has hitherto been accepted in regard to his position. For instance, Mr. C. F. Keary in his introduction to vol. ii of the *British Museum Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Coins*, p. xxxvii, writes thus:—

“Æthelred, the leading ealdorman of Mercia, and a man of the old blood royal, was made the lord or the ealdorman (but not, we observe, the king) of the Mercians, and he was married to Æthelflæd, the famous ‘Lady of the Mercians,’ the daughter of Ælfred and sister of Eadward the Elder. But, of course, this under-lordship did not include the right to strike coins; so that if Æthelred issued money at any mint in his dominions, that coinage would bear the name of Ælfred, just as Eadgar’s Mercian coinage (struck in the lifetime of Eadwig) would bear Eadwig’s name.”

I am by no means sure that Mr. Keary’s assumption that Eadgar did not strike coins bearing his own name during his rule in Mercia in the lifetime of Eadwig is correct:—indeed, in my opinion, there is numismatic evidence to the contrary. But let us proceed with our main subject and see what the charters and chronicles disclose in reference to Æthelred and his wife Æthelflæd. The first charter wherein this Æthelred can be identified with certainty is Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, No. 537, assigned to a date between A.D. 872 and 874. Herein he is styled *Merciorum dux*. In *B.C.S.*, No. 547, assigned to A.D. 880, but corrected to 887, he is described as *dux et patricius gentis Merciorum*. Æthelflæd signs and confirms this charter as *conjux* or

*conjux*. In No. 551 (A.D. 883 or 884) he has the designations *ealdorman* and *dux*. In No. 552 Æthelred is described as *pricipatu dominio gentis Merciorum subfultus* and as *Merciorum gentis ducatum gubernans*. In No. 557 (A.D. 888) as *procurator in dominio regni Merciorum*. In No. 561 (A.D. 889), to which King Ælfred is a party, *subregulus et patricius Merciorum*, and in No. 582, of uncertain date, *Myrcna hlaford*. In like manner Æthelflæd is included with Æthelred in the description *Myrcna hlafordas*, and she is frequently styled *domina Merciorum*, and in No. 632, assigned to A.D. 916, after her husband's death, as *gubernacula regens Merciorum*.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *Æthelweard*, *Symeon of Durham*, and *Florence of Worcester* give similar descriptions, indeed *Æthelweard*, in Book IV, Chapter III, uses the words *rex Æthered* and *rex Æthered Myrciorum*, and later in the work, as of the year A.D. 909, writes of him as *qui tum regebat Northymbrias partes Myrciasque*. These definite descriptions, *rex*, used twice, and the verb *regebat* in the third quotation, would seem to preclude the suggestion that *rex* is written in error for *dux*.

In *Symeon of Durham*, vol. ii, p. 122, Rolls Series, the death of Æthelred is recorded under the year A.D. 912, and he is described as *Eximiae vir probitatis dux et patricius, dominus et subregulus Merciorum*, while earlier, at p. 88, he is described as *Merciorum princeps*.

A later authority, Roger of Wendover, in his account of the year 886, states definitely that Æthelred of Mercia was of the royal stock of that country.

In *Symeon of Durham* (vol. ii, p. 123), under the year A.D. 919, the death of Æthelflæd is recorded, and she is referred to as *Merciorum domina*; Æthelred, her deceased husband, is described as *subregulus*; and their sole daughter, Ælfwynn, is recorded to have been left *hæredem regni*. In the same passage these words are employed in reference to Æthelflæd's sole rule of Mercia *viii anno ex quo sola regnum Merciorum strenuo iustoque rexit moderamine*. Æthelflæd was the eldest child of the marriage of Ælfred the Great by his queen Ealhswith, daughter of Æthelred Mucil and of his wife Eadburh, who

is recorded as having been *de regali genere Merciorum regum* (*Symeon of Durham*, ii, 106). Æthelflæd was born about A.D. 869 and was married to Æthelred of Mercia before A.D. 886.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, under the year 886, records that King Ælfred restored London, and that all the Angle-race that were not in the bondage of the Danish men turned to him, and that he then committed the burgh to the keeping of the ealdorman Æthelred.

Having now recounted sufficient of Æthelred and Æthelflæd to show the important position they held in Mercia, I have the pleasure to describe the coin which I venture to assign to Æthelred, *rex*, or at the least *regulus*, of the Mercians. It is of that type of the money of his father-in-law which has been preserved to us in the largest number, and which by the compilers of the *British Museum Catalogue* is described as Type xiv :—



PENNY OF ÆTHELRED, SUB-REGULUS OF MERCIA.

*Obverse.*—Small cross pattée, around + ED GR ED RE, in four groups, retrograde, between two circles, the inner plain, the outer beaded.

*Reverse.*—EDEL

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≡TAN within a beaded outer circle.

R. Weight 20 grains.

It will be remembered that this is the type of Ælfred's coinage, which was copied both by Halfdene (Alfdene) II.<sup>1</sup> for his half-pence and by Guthrum of East Anglia for his pennies. As Guthrum did not receive his baptismal name of Æthelstan, which is that appearing upon his coins in the forms EDELIA, EDELTA, EDELTA, EDELTA, etc., until A.D. 878, and as he did not permanently settle in East Anglia until A.D. 880, it is probable that Ælfred's coins of Type xiv were those current not earlier than that date, for it is only reasonable to suppose

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Andrew's "Buried Treasure," *B.N.J.*, vol. i, p. 21.

that the new coinage of Æthelstan II. would accord with the latest issue of his godfather Ælfred. It is, however, possible that Æthelstan's coins may have been issued at any time before his death in A.D. 890. It is not unlikely that they were issued after the agreement known as "Ælfred and Guthrum's Frith" had been entered into in A.D. 886. If this conjecture be correct, the date to be assigned to my coin of Æthelred of Mercia would synchronize with that of his appointment as governor of London by King Ælfred. That Type xiv preceded the monogram types, Types vi to ix, with which are associated Types xii and xx, is, I think, shown by the evidence of the unique coin which forms Type x of the arrangement of Ælfred's coinages in the *British Museum Catalogue*. This has an obverse of Type xiv, less the inner circle, and a reverse of Type ix. Type xi is also intermediate between Type xiv, with which its obverse corresponds, and the *small monogram* type usually associated, but not exclusively so, with the name of the moneyer TILEVINE. Further confirmation of this order is afforded by an unpublished round half-penny of the Lincoln mint, in my own collection, having the obverse of Type xiv and the reverse of Type ix, which I have referred to as the *small monogram* type.

As regards the moneyer EDELSTAN, whose name appears upon the reverse of the coin of Æthelred under discussion, I find that the same name occurs upon a coin of Ælfred of Type xiv, *British Museum Catalogue*, vol. ii, No. 308, whereon the name and title of the obverse legend are formed into three groups, these indicating, as suggested by the late Sir John Evans, the "pall" formation of Canterbury, and upon three coins of Type xvii of the Canterbury mint, Nos. 22-24 in the catalogue. It also appears upon coins of Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, of similar type to the three last-mentioned pennies of Ælfred. These cannot be earlier in date than A.D. 890, the year of Plegmund's consecration.

If my suggestion be correct that the coin of Æthelred was struck soon after the government of London was entrusted to him, in A.D. 886, it is not unlikely that moneyers would be temporarily imported from Canterbury to reinstitute a coinage in the restored city. I also suggest

that so important an appointment as the governorship of the capital city of Mercia, coupled with his then recent alliance with the daughter of the King of Wessex, may well have caused Æthelred to feel that he was entitled to the privilege of coinage in his own name, knowing as he did that his predecessor, the puppet King Ceolwulf II. of Mercia, Halfdene II. of Northumbria, and Guthrum-Æthelstan of East Anglia had exercised, or were exercising, similar rights. He must also have known that at this time, and for long previously, the Archbishops of Canterbury had been accustomed to strike coins bearing their own names, images and superscriptions, a circumstance equally well known to the moneyer Æthelstan of Canterbury. It is not unlikely that Ælfred took another view and that, on this being explained to his son-in-law, the latter ceased to coin in his own name.

As regards the date of issue of the coinage of Æthelred of Mercia, my remarks and suggestions must be considered as being only of a tentative character, pending a critical examination and consideration of the coins of Ælfred the Great and his contemporaries with the definite object of elucidating the question of the probable chronological sequence of the types.

