

A CUT NEW ENGLAND THREEPENNE ATTRIBUTED TO
THE LEEWARD ISLANDS.

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THE coin illustrated below appears to be a genuinely cut threepenny-piece made by division of the Massachusetts or New England shilling into four parts. Its weight is $18\frac{1}{2}$ grains, which is half a grain over the weight of the round threepenny-piece, and its fine condition is such as to preclude the idea that it is a shilling cut into four parts in modern times, since the whole coin in this condition would be much more valuable than the four sections. In view of the fact that round threepenny pieces were struck in Massachusetts in fair numbers, it is improbable



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that this cut coin circulated in that State of New England; but, as is well known,¹ the device of segmentising alien coins for small currency was at one time almost universal in the West Indian Islands, which, with rare exceptions, had no native money in metal for a long period, using instead the currency of the surrounding countries, chiefly Spanish coins. There seems no doubt, therefore, that this coin was cut for circulation in the West Indian Islands. The question arises as to which island or group of islands the coin belongs.

¹ On this subject see Mr. J. B. Caldecott's paper, "The Spanish Dollar as adapted for Currency in our West Indian Colonies," vol. i, pp. 287-298.

Some light on the subject will, I think, be obtained by a perusal of the currency Acts of the various islands. The first date of issue of the whole coin, of which the cut piece under notice forms a part, was 1652, although it should be mentioned that coins bearing this same date were struck in succeeding years for a considerable period. Now in 1670 an Act regulating the metallic currency of Montserrat, one of the Leeward Islands group, states that all New England money shall pass and be received by all manner of persons residing upon this island at its full value in New England.¹

A similar enactment was passed in 1672 at two other islands of this group—Antigua and Nevis—and the Nevis Act further stated that all money coined in New England, and there called shillings, sixpences, threepences, twopences, and pence, shall also pass current in this island for the like value as the same in New England.¹

Here we have clear evidence that the Massachusetts money circulated in the Leeward Islands. As before mentioned, the main places of origin of cut coins were the islands of the West Indies, and a fairly large proportion of such coins can be allocated to their particular places of issue by the name or initials stamped upon them. The cut coin of this article is, however, unmarked, but so far as the Leeward Islands group is concerned there is documentary evidence that unmarked cut coins were largely in use in that group, for, by an Act of 1801, it was ruled that in the Virgin Islands, which had been added to the original group, all holders of round or cut pieces of money should bring them to a committee to be stamped under their inspection and reissued. The committee were to provide a proper stamp, and the stamped coins were to pass at the same rates and values as before.² A similar Act, judged by its title, was passed in the same year in St. Kitts,² and as regards Montserrat it is on record that dollars and other Spanish coins were cut by order of the legislature. As is well known, Dominica

¹ *A History of Currency in the British Colonies*, by Robert Chalmers, 1893, p. 64.

² *Colonial Currency*, p. 75.

and Nevis, two more islands of the group, seem to have had a fairly prolific issue of cut coins, and it is possibly the fact that all the Leeward Islands took the same action as that on record for the Virgin Islands.

From the above there emerge the three cardinal facts—that the islands comprising the Leeward group used Massachusetts money ; that, to make small change, some of the larger denominations of the coins were cut ; that in some of the islands, if not in all, the cut money was used at first unmarked. Mr. Howland Wood, of the American Numismatic Society, and an authority on the coinages of the West Indies, wrote recently in a letter to me upon this coin :—

This is the first specimen of which I have heard, much less have seen. I do not know that these pieces were ever cut in Massachusetts. I consider your piece perfectly genuine, and I agree with you that it was cut in the West Indies.

Having regard to the references in the various coinage Acts relating to the Leeward Islands, the inference is very strong that the cut coin under notice belongs to that group.

