

HALFPENNIES AND FARTHINGS OF HENRY VIII.

BY RAYMOND CARLYON-BRITTON.

IN a short paper entitled "Halfpence and Farthings of Henry VIII," printed in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1919, Mr. L. A. Lawrence, F.S.A., publishes a rather startling theory which he has propounded in regard to the halfpennies and farthings struck during the period A.D. 1464, or 65, to 1523; and more particularly with reference to those struck by Henry VIII. I think the best method of summarising Mr. Lawrence's arguments for those who may not have read his paper or who wish to refresh their memories, is by means of the following extracts from it. These I think contain all the pertinent points necessary for the purpose of showing, as I hope to be able to show, that the probability is that Mr. Lawrence has misinterpreted the meaning of the statute, upon which he largely bases his contention. The first paragraph of Mr. Lawrence's paper is as follows:—

Mr. G. C. Brooke has just been good enough to call my attention to a little bit of information which he found in *Ruding* under the year 1523,¹ and which refers to enactments of Parliament held in that year. We there read, "And whereas the farthings and halfpennies were struck with one coin so that the common people many times took the farthings for halfpennies, it was ordained that the farthings to be made from that time should have on one side a portcullis and on the other a rose with a cross."

A little later he continues:—

The most important fact in the quotation is that the people were frequently unable to distinguish their farthings from

¹ Vol. i, p. 302.

halfpence in this, the first coinage of Henry VIII, as they were made from the same dies.

Now looking to the fact that we do not know of any farthings at all after the cessation of the heavy coinage of Edward IV in 1464 or 5, until these portcullis rose farthings of Henry VIII, have we not here an explanation of their seeming absence? Surely these, like the corresponding coins of Henry VIII, were struck from the same coin.

And again—

Ruding's information now helps us to a better decision, in that we may say, with some degree of certainty, that those coins which are in good condition and weigh about 6 grains or more are halfpence, and that the coins also in good condition and weighing approximately half the weight are farthings.

To put it briefly, Mr. Lawrence contends that the words of the statute, "struck with one coin" mean that the halfpennies and farthings were struck from the same dies, the halfpennies and farthings being only distinguishable by their weight. Mr. Lawrence then gives the results he obtained by weighing "halfpennies" in his search for "farthings," so that presumably he is of the opinion that the diameter of the flans of the halfpennies and farthings of the coinages from 1464, or 65, until 1524, were approximately the same, and that the necessary difference in weight was obtained by employing a thinner flan, or possibly a flan of slightly smaller diameter, though not of the marked difference in diameter of, say, the farthings and halfpennies of Richard II.

If we are to accept Mr. Lawrence's theory, then, from 1464 to 1524, a period of sixty years, the farthings were of approximately the same diameter, design, and appearance as the halfpennies, and distinguished from the latter only by weight. It surely follows that the effect of the statute, as interpreted by Mr. Lawrence, upon the portcullis-rose farthings issued under its authority, would be merely that of change of type and not a change in the size of the coin, since there is no order in the Act for any alteration in diameter.



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And the logical conclusion, if we accept Mr. Lawrence's contention as to the distinction of halfpennies and farthings during this period, and the meaning of the statute of 1523, would be that the portcullis rose farthings were of the halfpenny size or diameter.

From the few surviving specimens of these portcullis rose farthings, which are admittedly the fruit of the enactment under discussion, we know that this is not the case, and that they are of the generally accepted diameter of the known and definitely attributed farthings issued previously to 1464 or 65. It is hardly conceivable that a statute giving such minute instructions as to the type of a proposed new farthing should omit so important a point as a change, or proposed change, in its size.

I think, therefore, that it is clear that the real meaning of the words in the statute "struck with one coin" is that the halfpennies and farthings had been of the same obverse and reverse types, or perhaps a better word than type would be pattern; that is, the crowned bust on the obverse surrounded by the legend, and the cross and pellets on the reverse and name of place of mintage. This indeed is, I think, the meaning that the passage most naturally conveys to one upon reading it.

The fact "that the common people many times took the farthings for halfpennies" is easily accounted for by this similarity of type and the size of the coins themselves; for no doubt the majority of the halfpennies in general circulation were clipped and worn, which would make the original difference in size almost negligible.

I would also venture to suggest that a very much more reliable test than that arrived at by weighing the coin in the case of a doubtful farthing, for the weight of the smaller denominations is admittedly very variable, would be by comparing the measured diameter of the inner circle surrounding the bust of the coin with that of an undoubted halfpenny of the same issue.

The accompanying plate of halfpennies and farthings, a description of which is appended to this note, shows I think quite clearly that there is an appreciable difference in the diameters of the inner circles of these two denominations throughout the series. I should

like to draw particular notice to the illustration of Colonel Morrieson's farthing of Henry VII, Fig. 17, and to that of the Restoration farthing of Henry VI, Fig. 11, formerly in the collection of Mr. F. A. Walters and now in the National Cabinet. Both these coins, should further proof be deemed necessary, seem to dispose of Mr. Lawrence's contention that they were not struck during the period A.D. 1464, or 65, to 1523 of the proportionate farthing size.

In conclusion, I should like to give the actual wording of the paragraph of the Act of 1523 more particularly referred to above, being that in the Statutes of the Realm, printed in 1817 by order of King George III, which is as follows :—

“ And forasmuch as at this present tyme farthynges and half pens be stryckyn all with oon coyne, so that the cōmen People of the Realme many tymes take those that be ferthyns for halfpens ; Be it therefor enacted by thauctorite aforesaid that all such ferthynges that from hensforth shalbe made withyn this Realme shall have uppon the oon side thereof the prent of the Port colys and uppon the other side thereof the prynt of the Rose with a crosse ; upon lyke payn.”

My grateful thanks are due to the Keeper of the Coins and Medals in the British Museum ; to our President Mr. F. A. Walters, and to Lieut.-Colonel H. W. Morrieson for the loan of coins and casts for illustration.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLATE.

1. Richard II halfpenny. Col. H. W. Morrieson.
2. Richard II farthing. R. Carlyon-Britton.
3. Henry IV heavy halfpenny. F. A. Walters.
4. Henry IV farthing.¹ National Collection.
5. Henry IV light halfpenny. F. A. Walters.
6. Henry IV farthing.¹ National Collection.
7. Henry V halfpenny. Col. H. W. Morrieson.
8. Henry VI halfpenny of Calais; obverse, the annulet coinage; reverse, the rosette-mascle coinage. R. Carlyon-Britton.
9. Henry VI farthing of Calais, annulet coinage. L. Bruun.
10. Henry VI Restoration halfpenny. National Collection.
11. Henry VI Restoration farthing. National Collection.
12. Edward IV halfpenny; mint-mark, annulet enclosing pellet. R. Carlyon-Britton.
13. Edward V halfpenny; mint-mark, sun and rose dimidiated. R. Carlyon-Britton.
14. Richard III halfpenny; mint-mark, sun and rose dimidiated. Col. H. W. Morrieson.
15. Henry VII halfpenny; open crown; mint-mark, lys on rose. R. Carlyon-Britton.
16. Henry VII halfpenny; arched crown. Col. H. W. Morrieson.
17. Henry VII farthing; arched crown. Col. H. W. Morrieson.
18. Henry VIII halfpenny; first issue, mint-mark, portcullis crowned. Col. H. W. Morrieson.
19. Henry VIII halfpenny; second issue, mint-mark, sunburst. R. Carlyon-Britton.
20. Henry VIII halfpenny; later issue, annulet enclosing pellet in centre of reverse. R. Carlyon-Britton.
21. Henry VIII portcullis farthing; mint-mark, portcullis. National Collection.
22. Henry VIII portcullis farthing; mint-mark, arrow. National Collection.
23. Edward VI halfpenny; mint-mark, escallop. National Collection.
24. Edward VI portcullis farthing. National Collection.

¹ The farthing, No. 6, at present attributed to the heavy coinage because of its weight, 4.5 grains, should, if judged by its style, be given to the light coinage; whereas the light farthing, No. 4, which is earlier in style although it weighs only 3.75 grains, has features indicating that its reattribution to the heavy coinage has serious claims.

