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ON THE

ARCHAIC MODE

OF

EXPRESSING NUMBERS

IN ENGLISH, SAXON, FRIESIC, ETC.

BEING AN ESSAY TOWARDS THE SETTLING OF THE CASE,
GRIMM v. SELF, KEMBLE, VERNON, AND OTHERS.

BY

E. THOMSON, ESQ.,

Author of 'German-English Analogies,' and Editor of 'Select Monuments,' viz,
Aelfric on the Eucharist—on Peter, a Monastic Liturgy
in prose and verse, A.-S., Lat., and Eng.

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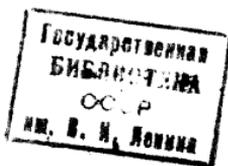
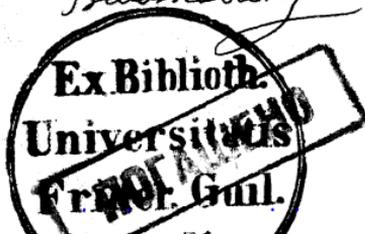
THE following Essay was written in the early part of last summer, and offered gratuitously to the 'Notes and Queries;' but as the writer was informed that this useful periodical was two months at least in arrears with previous Contributors, he withdrew his papers, and endeavoured to meet the emergency to which allusion is made p. 9, by private communication. In October he committed his MS. into the hands of Mr. Russell Smith, to see if it were suitable for the Essay department of his 'Retrospective Review,'—but after the appearance of three Numbers of that Work, finding that its pages were filled with matter more answerable to its title, and being anxious, at the risk of some pecuniary loss, to check, if possible, the progress of error, I resolved to send the materials to press as a separate publication. Every candid mind must join with me in feeling for the regret with which that noble spirit from which the error sprang, must have seen it spread so widely and so long, after the honest judgment and amiable candour of the matchless philologist had retracted the erroneous suggestion, and furnished the most convincing evidence of the opposite conclusion. When will our retailers of Teutonic lore venture beyond the second volume of the DEUTSCHE GRAMMATIK?

I cannot forgo the opportunity of acknowledging the polite attention of Mr. Smith, in restoring the MS., of which I had not kept a duplicate—a boon which, the complaints of some contributors to periodicals would lead us to believe, is sometimes withheld.

E. T.

London, 27th April, 1853.

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ARCHAIC MODE OF EXPRESSING NUMBERS.

OUR English ancestors had two very curious and concise modes of expressing numbers, both of which have been variously and often erroneously interpreted in modern times. The one consists of an ordinal number, followed by "healf;" the other of a cardinal number, followed by "sum."

In the former, as it is now generally understood, the numeral adjective defining or qualifying "healf" shows how many integers have preceded it—in other words, how many halves have been named and made up to integers, by the complementary halves,—not named as halves, because the integers completed by them are no longer counted fractionally: thus "fifte healf hundred," the fifth half hundred—not 250 by reckoning 200 as four halves—much less can it be, as was once supposed, "*fifty (being half a hundred)*," but 450,—because four *whole* hundreds must come before the fifth *half*. The 19th half year is = $18\frac{1}{2}$ years, the eleventh half pound = £10. 10s.,—&c. &c.

In the latter, as it has been ascertained, though not generally understood in this country, THE LITERAL RENDERING OF THE WORDS GIVES THE EXACT VALUE OF THE EXPRESSION. What the literal rendering ought to be must be gathered, 1. from the meaning of the words taken separately; 2. from the structure of the phrases in which they are combined.

1. The words which enter into combination with "sum" have been stated to be cardinal numbers; and their literal rendering should seem a matter of no great difficulty. The change or omission of one or two letters, in each or most of the words, is all that is required to reconcile our modern English forms with the more ancient forms of the Saxon, Anglian, and Friesic, or (to include all three in one general expression) the continental and insular Anglo-Saxon. The insular has now passed into English, the continental into Friesic with its subordinate dialects, Hindelopian, Saterlandish, &c.; but the compound denomination equally applicable to both, though now repudiated by some, and misunderstood perhaps by more, is sanctioned in its extensive and original application by the usage of the learned, from the times of Camden (who informs us that "the *English-Saxon* was