

On a Roman Inscribed Bronze Plaque, in the Taunton Museum.

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IN 1916 Taunton Museum was enriched by a gift of specimens from the collection of the late Rev. W. F. Rose, Rector of Hutton, some of them of local origin and some from the Mediterranean; see the Curator's report in *Proceedings*, vol. LXII, p. lvi, etc. One of the Mediterranean objects (*Ibid*, p. lxii) is a little bronze plate, a votive tablet, bearing an inscription, slightly obscured by rust so that a barred and an unbarred A are hard to distinguish in it:—

DEO · AETER
NO · ĀECLA
NIA PRIM
ITIVA VOT
L S

to which, perhaps, rather more interest attaches than the brief note in the report indicates. The plate is a small piece of bronze, of the common shape sometimes called "ansate"; it measures 2¾ ins. in length by 1¾ ins. in height. The full lettering is:—

deo aeterno Aeclania Primitiva vot(um) l(ibenter) s(olvit),
that is,

"to the eternal God Aeclania Primitiva pays her vow."

Aeclania Primitiva is an altogether unknown person, who seems to have taken her very unusual name from an Italian town, Aeclanum, in Samnium. This was a place of some local importance, both in the later Republic, and also in the

Empire, when it held colonial rank, and was the seat of a christian bishop. Destroyed in A.D. 669, it then practically ceased to be inhabited, but its ruins still survive at Le Grotte, near to Mirabella, on the line of the Appian Way.

Our bronze was seen, copied and published by Mommsen¹ when he was collecting the inscriptions of the Kingdom of Naples about 1840-50. According to him, it was then or lately had been in the hands of a French archæologist, Millingen. This is confirmed by the only record of origin which has come to our Museum from Mr. Rose, namely an old paper wrapper on which is written—

Pour M. Rollin, 12, Rue Vivienne,
Paris. De la part de D. A. Millingen (or Dr. A. Millingen).

The names are significant. M. Rollin seems to be a member, perhaps the head, of the well-known Paris firm of archæological dealers, Rollin and Feuardent (44, Rue de Louvois).² Millingen or Van Millingen is the name of several archæologists in the last century. I do not know precisely which bearer of the name is here meant. Alexander Millingen (or Van Millingen), who was, till his death not very long ago, head of the Robert College, at Constantinople, can hardly be meant, as he was born somewhere about 1840, and would have been little interested in antiquities at the date when Mommsen was at work on this inscription. However, it seems fairly plain that our tablet has passed through the hands of dealers and collectors, and no one will be surprised to hear that its origin is forgotten. Mommsen, working about 1845, had no better information on this point than that he saw the object in private hands and, in default of other clue, the unusual nomen, *Aeclania*, led him to refer it to the Italian town, *Aeclanum*. It is an unusual slip on his part that he does not say *where* he saw it, but we may presume that it was in Italy.

Lastly, a word about the cult of the *Deus aeternus*. His worship, known only through inscriptions, occurs not seldom

1. See *Inscriptiones regni Neapolitani* (1852), no. 1086: it was reprinted in the *Corpus Inscript. Latinarum*, vol. IX (Berlin, 1883), no. 1092.

2. They, as Sir A. Evans tells me, used to have offices in the Rue Vivienne.

in Italy, as well as in various provinces of the central Empire, and seems to have belonged to the second and third centuries. Probably it is of Eastern origin, like most of the cults which use the epithet 'eternal.' But we know little of the definite attributes of the God; once, on a monument, he appears with the lightning and thunderbolt of Jupiter. Nor is it clear what is exactly meant by calling a God 'eternal.' Several religions of the ancient world admitted that Gods could die. The Norse story of 'Balder dead' is not unique. Even in Homer Apollo addresses Achilles, who is attacking him (*Iliad*, xxii, 13):—"Thou wilt not kill me, since I am not mortal to you." As if the death of Apollo were not in itself inconceivable, even to a Greek, who called his Gods the 'Immortals' (*ἀθάνατοι*).