

‘We thank you heartily, send by A and B, our ambassadors, presents of equal value; and hope that mutual concord will always unite our States.’

2. KING THEODORIC TO THE HAESTI.

[These are the Aestii of Tacitus, dwelling in or on the south border of the country which is still called Esthonia. Tacitus also mentions their quest of amber¹.] The Haesti, dwellers by the Baltic. Their present of amber.

‘It is gratifying to us to know that you have heard of our fame, and have sent ambassadors who have pressed through so many strange nations to seek our friendship.’

‘We have received the amber which you have sent us. You say that you gather this lightest of all substances from the shores of the ocean, but how it comes thither you know not. But, as an author named Cornelius [Tacitus] informs us, it is gathered in the innermost islands of the ocean, being formed originally of the juice of a tree (whence its name *succinum*²), and gradually hardened by the heat of the sun.’

‘Thus it becomes an exuded metal, a transparent softness, sometimes blushing with the colour of saffron, sometimes glowing with flame-like clearness³. Then, gliding down to the margin of the sea, and further purified by the rolling of the tides, it is at length transported to your shores to be cast up upon them. We have thought it better to point this out to you, lest you should imagine that your supposed secrets have escaped our knowledge.’

¹ Germ. 45: ‘Ergo jam dextro Suevici maris litore Aestiorum gentes alluuntur, quibus ritus habitusque Suevorum, lingua Britannicae propior . . . Sed et mare scrutantur ac soli omnium succinum quod ipsi glesum vocant, inter vada atque in ipso littore legunt.’ Then follows an account of the nature of amber, and a history of its supposed origin, from which Cassiodorus has borrowed in this letter.

² Cassiodorus apparently spells this word with two c’s. The more usual spelling is with one.

³ ‘Modo croceo colore rubens, modo flammea claritate pinguescens.’