

TWO HOARDS OF ROMAN COINS FOUND IN SOMERSETSHIRE IN 1666.

By F. HAVERFIELD, M.A., F.S.A., Hon. F.S.A. Scot.

Writers on the Roman antiquities of Somerset commonly state that a large hoard of Roman coins belonging to all periods of the Empire was found in 1666 at Conquest Farm, in the parish of Bishop's Lydeard, three miles north of Taunton, and close to Norton Fitzwarren. The find has been used to support various theories about the Romano-British occupation of Taunton, and these theories have gained some currency. An examination of the evidence for the find has, however, shown me that both the place where the coins were found and the character of the coins themselves have been seriously misdescribed.

The sole authority for the find is an anonymous dissertation composed by a local Somersetshire antiquary at or about the time when the coins were discovered. The manuscript of this dissertation was in 1689 in the possession of Andrew Paschal, rector of Chedzoy from 1662 till 1694, and sometime Canon of Wells. He mentions it in some of his letters to his friend, John Aubrey, which are preserved in the Bodleian Library,¹ and, *inter alia*, he observes that the author was "an antiquary in our part," but omits to give his name.² The dissertation subsequently came into the hands of Thomas Hearne and was printed by him *in extenso* at the end of his edition of Peter Langtoft's *Chronicle* (Oxford, 1725). This is not exactly the kind of publication in which one would expect to meet it, but Hearne was discursive even beyond the average of antiquaries, and was always ready

¹ See Paschal's letters to Aubrey of Nov. 4 and Dec. 2, 1689, and April 7, 1690, in the Bodleian (MS. Aubrey 13, pp. 83-4 and 15, p. 118). The letter of Dec. 2, 1689, has been printed in a volume of *Miscellanies on Several Curious Subjects* (London, 1714).

² Our *Anonymous* wrote also a treatise

on Stonehenge, which he took to commemorate a victory of Cangi over Belgae. Two other Somerset men of the seventeenth century wrote on the same topic, John Webb, of Burleigh (1611-72), and Walter Charleton, of Shepton Mallet, but their views differ from that of the *Anonymous*.

to print what interested him in any of his antiquarian volumes which chanced to be passing through the press at the convenient moment. What has since become of the manuscript is unknown, and, thanks to Hearne, is also immaterial. The dissertation itself, as we can read it, is a poor, uncritical bit of work, full of strange etymologies after the manner of the seventeenth century, and characterized by a considerable ignorance of Roman numismatics.

It has been usually quoted as stating that the hoard in question was found at Conquest Farm. In reality it states nothing of the sort. Those who have so quoted it have merely exhibited the carelessness which is characteristic of many English antiquaries. They have read only the title of the dissertation, and read even that wrong. The title states that the coins were found "near Conquest," and the text shows that Conquest is thus emphasized simply because the author thought Conquest Farm to record by its name the final conquest of Britain by the Romans—an idea which needs no criticism now. But the actual *provenance* which he assigns for the coins is different and, indeed, twofold. "Two large earthen Pitchers," he says, "full of Roman Medalls, each 80*l.* Troy weight, were digged up by Labourers with Mattocks in ploughed fields, the one in Laurence Liddyard, the other within the parish of Stogumber adjoyning." He adds that the latter of the two was found in the north of Stogumber parish, at Capton, towards Williton. The former of these sites is about eight miles, the latter about thirteen miles from Taunton in a north-westerly direction. Neither hoard, assuredly, has any connection with any Romano-British occupation of the site of Taunton.

The character of the two hoards has been no less misdescribed than their number and *provenance*. The author of the dissertation omits to tell us whether the coins in the two earthen pitchers differed or what their metals were, and what he does tell us is by no means satisfactory. He states that "the most ancient and greater part of those Coynes were of Claudius Caesar," and he gives a number of reverses; the other coins, he says, belonged to "Domitius Nero, Domitianus, Trajanus,

Antoninus, Victorinus, Septimus Severus, Tacitus, Galienus, Aurelius, Aurelian, Tetricus, Quintillus, Posthumus, etc., yea almost all the successors of Claudius about 500 years, till the Romans left this land." Some of them "had some light Tincture on them, as if they had been silvered over." Some conclusions can be drawn from these statements, but they are not quite those which our author would have expected. The bulk of the coins obviously consisted of copper—thus much is implied by the mention of some coins as silvered over. The bulk of them, moreover, belonged to the third century. The coins of Claudius, of which our author quotes reverses, and which he mentions as specially abundant, are not coins of Claudius I., but of an obscurer Claudius Gothicus who reigned A.D. 268–270. The coins of Gallienus, Tacitus, Tetricus, Quintillus, Postumus, Aurelian, date from the same epoch, and the silvered coins are plainly the so-called Antoniniani which were minted in some plenty during the larger part of the third century. What we should say of the earlier emperors named by our author is less clear. The hoards may have included, among the mass of third century issues, some few specimens from the first or second century. But these would probably have been "large brass" and would have been noticed as such by their contrast with the small third century copper and pseudo-silver. It is at least as likely that a writer who confused Claudius I. with Claudius Gothicus made also other errors. His Trajan may be the Trajanus Decius who reigned A.D. 249–251, and his Domitius Nero and Domitianus may be Domitius Aurelian, emperor in A.D. 270–275. His obvious desire to increase the extent of his hoard and magnify its importance would aid his error, just as it has obviously led him into his empty phrase about "all the emperors from Claudius for 500 years till the Romans left Britain." At any rate, we may conclude that the bulk of the coins belonged to the third century and for the most part to the third quarter of it (A.D. 250–275), and in default of evidence to the contrary, and as the bulk of the coins were of the same character, we may consider the two hoards not to have greatly differed. Such hoards are common. The second half of the third

century was a troubled time, in which men lost or buried their treasure frequently enough. There is nothing strange in the notion that two hoards of this class were buried on the edge of the Quantocks in Somerset. The size of the hoards is, however, noteworthy. We are told that each weighed 80 pounds Troy, and there may therefore have been in each—"third brass" and debased Antoniniani mixed—as many as 10,000 coins. These are by no means the largest of such hoards. Thirty thousand coins of this epoch were found in 1873 near Blackmoor House in Hampshire, and nearly 20,000 were found at Baconsthorpe in Norfolk in 1878. But two hoards of 10,000 coins each deserve at least a reference to their size.