

On the Recent Discovery of Roman Coins at Shipley, with some Remarks on "Treasure Trove" in general.

BY NATHAN BALL, F.R.H.S.

FEW years draw to a close without the addition of fresh light, either local or general, being brought to bear on the past history of our country and its people. Such light is not unfrequently the result of investigation and research, carried out in a systematic manner by those whose chief reward is the pleasure which they derive by being able from time to time to lay before the public the fruits of their endeavours. But no less interesting in their way are the unlooked for "finds," which now and again attract the attention of the antiquary, or the geologist, to some quiet spot outside the usual sphere of their observation. To this latter class belongs the "find" which forms the subject of our present remarks.

Derbyshire is especially rich in such "finds." Its caves, camps, and mounds have added their tribute of unwritten history to its records, and it stands almost unrivalled for examples of archaeological interest and importance.

The "find" at Shipley is an isolated one, and is interesting as presenting one more example of Roman supremacy in the neighbourhood, and perhaps also as being a relic of the disturbances which in the latter half of the third century shook that great Empire to its foundations.

The particulars of the discovery are already well known. It

occurred on Sept. 25th, on the workings of the Great Northern Branch Railway, now in course of construction between Ilkeston and Heanor.

The line of railway passes through the Shipley estate of E. M. Mundy, Esq., and the find hails from a spot on this property, about mid-way between the two named places.

A navvy, excavating at a depth of about twelve inches, struck his pickaxe against something which turned out to be an earthenware jar, filled with a large mass of corroded coins. These, to



URN CONTAINING ROMAN COINS: SHIPLEY.

the number of a thousand or more, were quickly dispersed in the hands of neighbouring workmen, and amongst several miners who were passing at the time.

The majority of the coins were much worn, and thickly covered with verdigris, and so matted together, that in some instances it was found necessary to use a chisel or similar article to separate them.

On examination they were found to be Roman, third brass.

Out of a casual collection of nineteen, which the writer has, may be read the names of Claudius, Aurelianus, Gallienus, Tacitus, Victorinus, and Tetricus, while others bear the names of Vespasian and Clodius. All these are Imperial coins, having the portrait of the Emperor on the obverse side, and on the reverse generally an allegorical figure.

Subjoined is one or two examples of the inscriptions, which may be taken as a fair specimen of the whole.

- { Obv. (Crowned head), IMPCCLAVDIVSAVG.
- { Rev. (Standing figure, in profile), IOVIS . . . A . .
- { Obv. (Crowned head), IMPCLTACITVSAVG.
- { Rev. (Robed figure, erect), TEMPORVMFELICITAS.
- { Obv. (Crowned head), GALLIENVS.
- { Rev. (Stag or hind), letters obscure.
- { Obv. (Crowned head), ENV . . VG.
- { Rev. ("Justice" holding pair of Scales), EQVITAS.
- { Obv. (Crowned head), IMPCAVRELIANVSAVG.
- { Rev. (Two figures in profile, erect, facing each other),
PRO VID . ND . HOR . VXXT.

Claudius was Emperor from 41 to 54 A.D.; Vespasian, from 69 to 79 A.D.; Clodius Albinus (previously a Roman general in Britain), from 193 to 197 A.D.; Gallienus, from 253 to 268 A.D.; Aurelianus, 270 to 275 A.D.; Tacitus, 275 to 276 A.D.; and Victorinus and Tetricus during an unsettled period in the reign of Gallienus.

These dates allow us to fix the depositing of the urn towards the close of the third century, at a time when the Roman Empire was in the midst of its difficulties.

As a trait in human character, it is interesting to notice that when first found, large numbers of the coins were freely disposed of for a few pence, but when public interest became excited in the matter, the price rose to so much in one instance, as ten shillings per coin.

The vase or urn in which they were found is of baked clay, unglazed.

When discovered, it was in an upright position, and closely padded round with clay. Unfortunately, this is now broken into several fragments, but when intact would measure about 11 inches in height, and 30 inches in circumference at its widest part. Traces of ornamentation may be discerned around the upper portion. It is now in the possession of C. Sebastian Smith, Esq, Steward to the Shipley Estate.

The surrounding neighbourhood has been disturbed for many years by the getting of coal, but no similar discovery has been made previously.

In some respects the occurrence bears points of resemblance to the well known "finds" at Greenhill Lane, near Ripley, in 1730, 1740, and 1748 respectively.

As already stated, Shipley lies somewhat out of the way of usual Roman discoveries in Derbyshire, and as such opens up a new phase in our local history.

It is well known that the Romans worked the lead mines of the High Peak, and several of our historians have spoken of a highway connecting that district with the Roman Causennis (or what other name Nottingham may have been known by).

Shipley lies in the line of communication between these places, and between many others lying on the Great Fosse Way and the uplands of Derbyshire. It is also within easy distance of the old Derby and Mansfield Road, a road which, although the fact has been entirely overlooked by our local historians, possesses many claims of a Roman origin.

These circumstances in themselves are sufficient to show that the locality was frequented during the Roman period both for military and industrial purposes, but the whole phase which is usually put upon Roman life in this country is, without doubt, too limited.

During the second century, which may be put down as the "golden age" of Roman Britain, there is just grounds for supposing that not only Derbyshire, but nearly the whole of the country enjoyed a high state of civilization; a state in which agriculture and industry flourished, and in which the essential traits of Roman life were paving the way for a Heaven-sent mission, whose brightest prospects shall cover the earth "as the waters cover the sea."

In the small matter of roads, it is a mistake to assume that the Romans had no other means of communication than that supplied by their excellent system of raised highways. Like ourselves, these intrepid pioneers had learnt that the nearest way between

two points is in a straight line, and this principle acted upon for temporary purposes would make the Roman the originator even of many of our bridle paths, a supposition which is by no means unlikely.

Thoughts which naturally rise to one's mind on the discovery of coins, or similar hidden treasure, are, "Who put them there?" and "For what purpose were they so deposited?" The answers to these questions may be as varied as the particular circumstances which call for them.

In the case under notice, we may safely say that they were concealed by a Roman soldier or citizen for purposes of security. "But what was the kind of danger that menaced either the person or the district at the time in question?" Presumably, one of insurrection or disturbance in the neighbourhood; a sudden call away, with an expectation of returning at no distant date; or, perhaps, the concealment was the likeliest substitute for a provincial bank which a thrifty person might have. Under any circumstances, they are the relics of "mind," as well as of "matter."

We learn from history that Derbyshire was in a very unsettled state about 275 A.D., in which year a colony of Roman soldiers at Derventio (Little Chester) was besieged by Britons and put to the sword. It is a significant fact that the same year also closes the dates of the coins found at Shipley.

The great empire which had spread its dominion far and wide was by sure degrees, and from various causes, beginning to fade. A few more years and the scattered remnants of the Roman legions withdrew from our shores for the last time.

The peculiar incidents connected with the discovery of hidden treasure have often been a matter of litigation and dispute. In former times the State was very exact in claiming to itself all, or part, of any "find" for State purposes or coinage. Latterly, however, its demands have been more laxative, and the general custom now appears to be a compromise between the persons more particularly affected.

"Treasure trove" is defined to be "money, or coin, gold,

silver, plate, or bullion, found hidden in the earth, or rather private place, the owner thereof being unknown."

As early as the time of the emperor Hadrian it was enacted "that half the value of any hidden treasure was to be left in possession of the finder, and the other half was to be considered the property of the owner of the land in which it was discovered." In the absence of any special arrangement this decree appears a good one, and one which might amicably answer our purpose to-day.