

NUMISMATICS.

It was formerly supposed that prior to the invasion of Cæsar the Britons did not possess a coinage of their own, and indeed, the testimony of Cæsar himself has been often adduced in support of the opinion of those who assign the origin of a British stamped currency to a period subsequent to the Roman conquest of Britain.

The patient labour and indefatigable zeal, with which, in the present day, numismatists have prosecuted researches on the early and obscure coins found throughout England, have, however, gone far towards establishing a satisfactory appropriation of many of them to periods anterior to the invasion of Cæsar, and have determined others to have been struck in Britain posterior to the Roman domination.

Indeed, when it is considered that Cæsar came into Britain as a military invader, that his stay was brief and confined, and his means of obtaining information necessarily circumscribed and difficult, we shall be justified in qualifying his statement that the Britons used iron rings instead of coins, in the belief that metallic rings worn as ornaments may have been applied to the purposes of money.

It is very clear that many of the rude coins found in this country present types distinct from those on the purely Gaulish coins, and which types cannot be traced to have been derived from Roman models. Like the earliest Gaulish, they seem to be imitations of Greek coins, more or less resembling the originals, but often so rudely copied, that it is only by comparison with others graduating towards similitude to the prototypes, that the fantastical objects upon them can be detected as imitated portions of designs on Greek coins, deteriorated more and more, by ignorant workmen attempting to imitate bad copies without a knowledge of their source, and without any aim to attach a meaning. Thus the earliest British coins have often on one side an ill-formed and disjointed horse, and on the other, an equally misshapen human head, laureated, but of which the wreath, or the curls of hair, only remain; some are stamped, on one side only, with a grotesque horse; others have symbols and ornaments of various kinds, such as wheels, flowers, and animals, many of which are evidently

attempts at imitation, and others, if design or object may be suspected, altogether difficult of explanation. They occur in gold, more or less pure, in silver, and in brass, and are usually concave and convex.

Under the Roman rule, the British coins exhibit great improvement; both consular and imperial Roman coins are obviously the models of many, and the names of British princes or chiefs, with towns and localities, are introduced. It is true that at present some of these are disputed, but there is every reason to infer from what has already been done, that well-directed research, aided by future discoveries, will decide their correct appropriation. The coins of Cunobelinus are very numerous and well executed. They often bear on the reverse the letters CAMV, for Camulodunum, the chief city of the territory under his rule. These pieces may be adduced as an instance of the importance of recording the places where coins are discovered. They are found in the greatest abundance in the neighbourhood of Colchester, which occupies the site of the ancient Camulodunum, where there is every reason to believe they were struck. By carefully noting the places that yield in greatest abundance the uninscribed British coins, the best foundation will be laid for their explanation and classification. The same mode may be adopted to classify the imitations of Greek coins, particular types of which may with safety be assigned to the people of the territories that were within the limits of the localities where they are found in the greatest number. The coins of Cunobelinus, and others probably contemporaneous, are the last as well as the finest of the British series, which appears to have been shortly after entirely superseded by the Roman money.

Many of the early coins found in England must have been in common circulation in Germany, in Britain, and in Gaul, as they are found in abundance throughout these countries. Fresh discoveries, however, of coins hitherto unknown, and which mature investigation will probably lead to their being assigned to the British series, are from time to time taking place, and induce a hope that, ere long, the facts already collected will not only be much augmented but better illustrated and explained.

For the study of British and Gaulish coins, the *Numismatic Chronicle*^a, and the *Revue Numismatique*^b, periodical publica-

^a London: Taylor and Walton.

^b Paris: Rollin, Rue Vivienne.

tions containing elaborate essays on the subject, and copious examples of the coins themselves, should be jointly consulted.

Roman coins, both consular and imperial, but especially the latter, are found throughout England in vast numbers. They occur in gold, silver, and brass; the gold and silver being about the size of our sixpence, but much thicker; the brass are classified in three series, called, first, second, and third; or, large, middle, and small; they accord in size with our penny, halfpenny, and farthing. But at the same time coins of intermediate and smaller dimensions will be met with; those in brass, of the later times of the Roman Empire, decrease to a minute size, the silver coins become thinner, and the designs upon them in lower relief, and the gold coins decrease in weight and extend in dimensions.

In all cases of discoveries of coins, it is of the first importance that they be examined *in mass* as early as possible, and accurately catalogued, to ensure their record before casualties occur, and to secure the advantage of inspecting a large number of each type in order to correct or restore defective legends. When coins are badly struck, as is frequently the case in the British and Gaulish series, it is sometimes necessary to compare a dozen specimens before the complete type can be restored; and the assistance of an experienced numismatist should be obtained whenever the coins are illegible, or doubt arises as to their classification.

A few simple directions for cleaning coins may be useful, it being to be borne in mind that the advice of a practised numismatist is always indispensable to the novice, who will at times find it difficult to judge of the metal of which coins are composed when obscured by rust.

Silver coins are often coated with a dense green oxide. To remove this they should be steeped for ten minutes in a solution of ammonia, then immersed in water and wiped with a soft towel; if necessary, a fresh quantity of the solution may be applied. The red rust which often attaches itself to silver coins, and is frequently found beneath the green, must be removed by lemon juice, or by a solution of citric acid. Tartaric and sulphuric acids may also be used, but the citric will be found the most effectual as well as the safest.

The numismatist in the progress of his researches will meet with numerous examples of ancient as well as modern forgeries. The ancient false coins are not void of interest; they are of

lead, iron, and brass, plated with silver, and will be found fully described and treated of in the works recommended hereafter.

Coins in brass and copper are injured by subjection to the action of acids, which destroy the pieces themselves as well as the rust, and for the same reason the application of solution of ammonia is objectionable. The thin rust or patina of various hues, which brass coins acquire from lying in particular soils, should never be disturbed; when this is so thick as to obscure the effigies or inscription, a graver or penknife may be used, provided the operator can discern, from any portion of the inscription that may be legible, the nature and position of the hidden parts. If not, an experiment so delicate and hazardous should not be attempted.

Brass coins which are found in marshy and boggy soils, and in the beds of rivers, are usually free from rust, and when first brought to light, often exhibit the appearance of gold.

As gold never rusts, the coins in that metal merely require washing in water with a soft brush.

All circumstances connected with the discovery of coins should be noted with care: such as, the locality, its natural and artificial features; whether urns, or fragments of pottery, tesserae of pavements, walls, weapons, ornaments, and skeletons, are, or have been, noticed; as, on the absence or presence of one or more of these various remains, safe and sound conclusions may depend.

In giving these brief instructions to such of our correspondents as may need them, it will be unnecessary to do more than merely advert to the great utility of ancient coins in the illustration of history; they serve to elucidate and to confirm events recorded by ancient writers, and, in some instances, are the sole memorials of others, forming connecting links in the great chain of historical records; they familiarize us with the civil and religious usages and customs of ancient times, and afford, in many instances, examples of the highest artistic skill.

In the Roman series many of the coins bear direct allusion to events connected with the history of our own country, while others, struck in Britain, furnish authentic and copious information at an important epoch in the annals of the province. For a full account of these interesting medallic

monuments, Akerman's *Coins of the Romans relating to Britain*^c may be recommended, and his *Descriptive Catalogue of rare and unedited Roman Coins* may be referred to for general ideas as to the rarity of Roman coins. As, in the latter work, only the rarer coins are given, the student may conclude that those which are not to be found therein are common. Banduri's *Coins of the Romans from Trajanus Decius to the termination of the Byzantine Empire*^d, an elaborate compilation, gives the common as well as the rare coins. The consular coins are fully described in the *Thesaurus Morelianus*. As an elementary work on coins in general, Akerman's *Numismatic Manual*, 2nd edit., will be found useful, nor should Pinkerton's 'Essay on Medals' be disregarded by the entire novice, especially if he be forewarned against placing confidence in the correctness of the list of prices at the end of the second volume.

The Roman and continental coins appear to have constituted the circulating medium in Britain, from the departure of the Romans to about the seventh century. The rude un-inscribed Saxon coins in silver termed *peactar* are probably earlier, but those the appropriation of which admits of no doubt commence about A.D. 670. The former exhibit undefinable marks, circles, squares, birds, dragons, and grotesque animals. Letters are found on some, together with a crowned head, and the cross, the symbol of Christianity, which, consequently, may be considered of later date; the others may be ascribed to the pagan princes anterior to the general propagation of Christianity.

The Saxons, long subsequent to their settlement in Britain, do not appear to have had any coinage of their own, and it would seem that for two centuries they chiefly used the Roman money with that of France, as well as personal ornaments adapted to answer the purposes of stamped money. Thus among the funereal remains of the Saxons, we find Roman, Byzantine, and Merovingian coins, which are of the greatest service in enabling us to determine the date of the object discovered with them, often exhibiting nothing in themselves sufficiently characteristic to fix dates. The earlier *peactar* are occasionally found in barrows with the remains of the

^c 2nd edit. London, 1844.

^d Numismata Imperatorum Romanorum a Trajano Decio ad Palæologus Augustos.

Paris, 1718. There is a Supplement to Banduri by Tanini. Rome, 1789.

dead; but by the time that the Saxons had established a regular coinage of their own, the usages of society had changed, and the practice of burying upon the hills after the manner of the pagans, had given way to the Christian custom of interring in church-yards. The absence of an early Saxon coinage is further accounted for, by the use of ornaments as a medium of commerce and traffic. Mr. Wright, in an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*^e, has cited several passages from the poem of Beowulf to shew that rings were as commonly used for money among the Saxons and other Teutonic tribes, as among the Celts. There is internal evidence, from the use of archaic forms and allusions to events, that this poem, in an older and more perfect form, was contemporary with the period when, as corroborative evidence proves, the Saxons had no stamped coinage of their own. Of Hrothgar (the Danish king) it is said,

He beot ne a-leh ;
 beagas dælde,
 sinc æt symle ;

He belied not his promise ;
 he distributed rings,
 treasure at the feast ;

The same king is also styled *beah-horda weard*, the keeper of the hoards of rings. Another king is spoken of as *owning a nation, a town, and rings*, and as *the giver of rings*, and throughout this poem the word *rings* is synonymous with that of treasure or money.

The other Saxon coins are the *styca* in brass, and the *penny* in silver. Examples of the halfpenny are also known, but of the *farthing*, mentioned in the Saxon laws and gospels, no specimen has come down to us. Many of the Saxon coins are rude imitations of the Roman small brass, although, from the low relief of the designs on the thin pieces of silver, as well as from the unskilfulness of the artists, the imitation is not easily detected. On the coins of "Eadweard," A.D. 901 to 924, the gate of the Prætorian camp, on the very common small brass coins of Constantine, is obviously copied, and on another, the hand of Providence, taken from Byzantine coins. The coins of Offa are however well executed, and those of other Saxon princes are not without occasional mediocrity of skill. The obverse of the Saxon pennies gives the name of the king, sometimes with and sometimes without the portrait; the reverse, the moneyer's name and place of mintage, the great

^e Gent.'s Mag. 1837. p. 497. et seq.

variety of which renders them valuable for the orthography of names of persons and places. On some of the earlier coins, Runic characters and Saxon letters are occasionally combined.

Recent discoveries have considerably increased the list of Saxon coins, and, notwithstanding the diligent researches of able numismatists, much remains to be done towards the explanation of many novel types. The chief works for the study of the Saxon coins, conjointly with the British and English, are, Ruding's *Annals of the Coinage of Great Britain*, Hawkins's *Silver Coins of England*, and Lindsay's *Coins of the Saxon Heptarchy*.

The transmission of the actual coins in all cases where correspondents are in doubt is recommended, but the frequent loss of money-letters entrusted to the Post Office, should caution persons against committing valuable coins to such a dangerous medium of conveyance. Provided the coins cannot be procured for inspection, impressions in sealing-wax should be taken of both sides of the coins, which should be simply pressed into the melted wax dropped on card or paper, as if sealing a letter. From these matrices, plaster casts can be taken, which for all common purposes will supply the place of the real coins. The great objection to casts is, that they do not warrant decision as to the genuineness of coins; and here it is necessary to guard collectors against the practices of forgers of ancient coins, who, both in Paris and in London, are continually fabricating imitations of ancient Greek, Roman, Saxon, and English money, which is dispersed by means of their agents throughout the country, and sold, often for high sums, to the inexperienced. It is practice alone that will enable the student to detect forged coins, and no rules, however clear and explicit they may appear, will supersede the necessity of a careful examination of ascertained forgeries, and their comparison with genuine specimens.

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