

## On an ancient Gold Corslet discovered near Mold.

BY THOMAS HUGHES.

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**A**NTIQUARIES generally are, not without reason, determined opponents of ghosts and ghost-seers. There are, however, exceptions to every rule, and the strange circumstance now about to be adduced is, haply, one of them. We have presented to us, in the present paper, a few details of a discovery, made 24 years ago, in a mound situate about a quarter of a mile from Mold, Flintshire, on the high road to Chester,—a discovery, perhaps, which is quite without a parallel in the annals of Cambria. And, first, let me disclaim all pretensions to originality in the remarks about to be offered. It is easy enough to flaunt about in borrowed plumes; but the merit of the discovery, let me once again say, is none of mine, nor, indeed, are the learned speculations concerning it.\*

In our time, the thirst for gold carries thousands away from the shores of old England to the wilds of California, and the still less accessible backwoods of Australia—these are the Ophir of the present generation. But, centuries ago, ere yet the genius of Christianity cast its influence o'er the earth, our Celtic forefathers, unused to the dangers and difficulties of the sea, sought for and obtained the auriferous metal from their own native soil. Nor is this mere idle surmise; for independent of the ancient ornaments of gold continually revealing themselves to the eye of Archæology, we are not without some evidence that they may have been also the production of British mines. Wales possesses more than one old mine, which has evidently been worked, and for gold alone, in the most primitive

\* The resources chiefly drawn upon in the preparation of this paper were the *Archæologia*, Vol. xxvi. p. 422, and the *Archæologia Cambrensis*, First Series, Vol. iii. pp. 98—104. The latter article is the production of a learned Welsh clergyman and antiquary, the Rev. J. Williams, now Vicar of Llanymowddwy, Merionethshire.

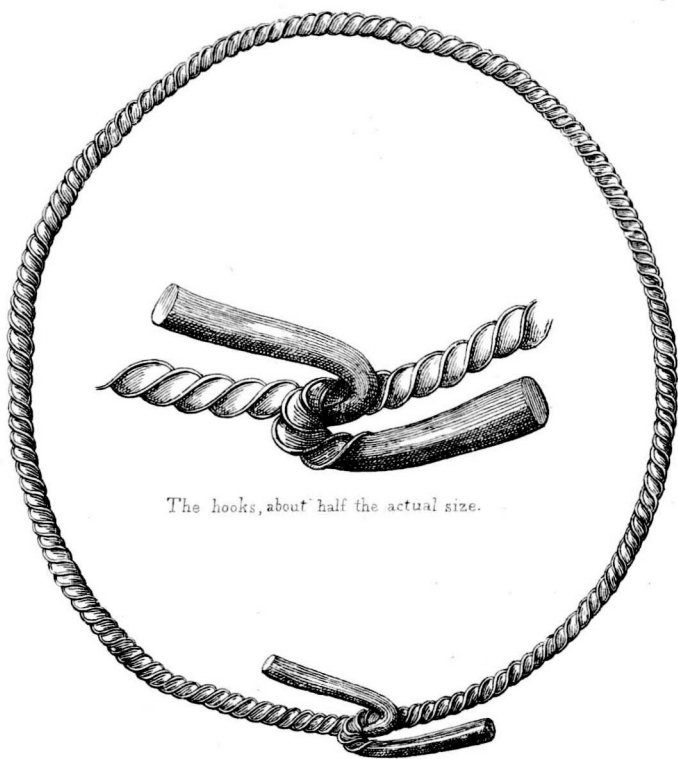
times.\* In the vicinity of South Molton, in the county of Devon, there is an ancient mine, which had never been disturbed for at least a thousand years, and yet which must, at some remote period, have been worked for gold, inasmuch as the copper ore was cast aside, evidently as waste, and unworthy attention. A few years ago, while I was resident in Devonshire, a company was started, under flattering auspices, for testing anew the golden resources of this ancient mine. Simple archæologist as I was, I invested in a few shares, and forthwith dreamed of the splendid fortune possibly in store for me. But alas ! for the vanity of human anticipations ! I paid call after call, with the philosophy of a martyr, and though gold did certainly appear here and there among the quartz, it was in such homœopathic doses, that both calls and capital dwindled away, and, so far as we poor shareholders were concerned,

Like the baseless fabric of a vision  
Left not a wreck behind.

Whatever may be the case, however, in the present day, it scarcely admits of a doubt that the golden ornaments of our aboriginal ancestors were, in some part, the produce of British mines. Other metals, such as tin and lead, were certainly obtained in England, and in immense quantities, from the earliest times ; for at the Chester Congress of the Archæological Association, in 1849, we find Mr. C. Roach Smith authoritatively telling us that “the Britons well understood the art of extracting tin and lead from their ores. These metals were among the chief articles of British commerce, which tempted the Romans to brave unknown seas and inhospitable shores, to carry roads over almost impassable morasses, walls over mountains, and, at a frightful sacrifice of human life and liberty, to hold possession of Britain divided from the world. In the time of Pliny, lead mines were worked in Spain and in Gaul ; but the exportation of the metal from Britain was so plentiful, that it became necessary to restrict its supply from that province by legal enactment.” If this were true of tin and lead, it is fair to surmise it was equally true, in a lesser proportion, of the higher metals also.

\* The Cwtter Eurychod, near Nantffranccon, and the Gogofau mines, are two that may be quoted in proof of this hypothesis. The *Cambrian Journal*, in an article on this subject in Vol i., p. 154, declares that “the mineral discoveries, daily taking place in different localities, are clearly proving that the Snowdonian range of mountains, in Carnarvonshire, as well as in Merionethshire, contain within them gold and other mineral treasures that will produce results which, previous to the introduction of railways, no one could have anticipated. . . . In sinking No. 3 pit of the Oakley mine, Merioneth, the men came upon a chamber of large dimensions, which appeared to be an old British or Roman work ; and on clearing to the bottom, about two fathoms deep, they turned up some old timber, nails, &c., carefully kept, which proved that the place had been worked, and that for gold, as no other ores were visible in it but gold stones at the bottom and sides.”

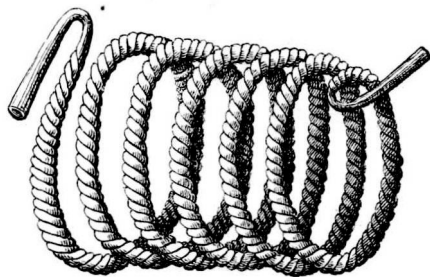




The hooks, about half the actual size.

#### GOLD TORQUES,

Circumference 44 inches, Weight very nearly 28 ounces. In the possession of the Marquis of Westminster.  
*[Found at Bryn Shen, near Holywell, Flintshire.]*



#### GOLD ARMILLA,

Nearly half the actual length. In the possession of Sir Philip de Malpas Grey Egerton, Bart.  
*[Found in Cheshire.]*

Ornaments of gold are not uncommonly found amongst Celtic remains, armillæ or torcs, fibulæ, bracelets, rings, and other articles, existing in almost every archæological collection. Perhaps the most celebrated and important in this locality is the elegant torc or necklace of solid gold, discovered near Holywell in 1816, and purchased by the late Marquis of Westminster for £400. This relic is preserved under a glass case in the Library at Eaton, and is an object of much curiosity to visitors.\* Two beautiful armillæ or bracelets, also of gold, were dug up between Egerton Hall and Hampton, Cheshire, in 1829, and now embellish the private museum of Sir P. de M. Grey Egerton, Bart. M.P., at Oulton Park.† Other and similar instances might be quoted, as, for instance, the torc or ring discovered in St. Werburgh Street, Chester, in 1852, illustrated at page 198 of our Journal. But it is now time to proceed to the immediate subject of this paper. As before stated the whole matter hinges on a ghost story, the which has, however, strangely enough, turned out to be “an ower true tale.”

On a farm, situate a short distance from the town of Mold, on the Chester road, stood, some 23 years ago, a gravel heap or hillock, known from time immemorial as Bryn-yr-Ellyllon (the Goblin's Hill); why or wherefore so designated was a mystery. Many years prior to 1833, as we learn from most reliable testimony, an old woman was returning from Mold, where she had been to fetch home her drunken husband from a tavern, and had to pass on her way this identical mound—the Goblin's Hill. It was about the midnight hour—

“The witching hour of night, sirs,”

that particular hour so sacred to ghosts and ghost seers, when lo! before the astonished gaze of the old lady a spectre of mammoth size appeared, “clothed in a raiment of gold which shone like the sun,” and, crossing the road before her with measured step, rested an instant on the fairy mound aforesaid, and then vanished into thin air! Full of affright, she hurried home her “inferior half,” and the next morning related the wondrous vision to her friends and neighbours. Among others who heard the story was the vicar of the parish, the Rev. Charles Butler Clough, afterwards Archdeacon,

\* It was figured and fully described at p. 333 of the Journal of the Archæological Association, Vol. v. and from that engraving our own illustration is a faithful copy.

† These ornaments were engraved in the *Archæologia*, Vol. xxvii. p. 401, and the description at p. 400 of that work states that they were found “near Egerton Hall, while digging for the foundation of a cottage, in 1831. The date given in the text (1829) was supplied to us by Sir Philip Egerton himself, and is, no doubt, the more correct of the two. Our illustration is copied from the one given in the Journal of the Archæological Institute, Vol. v. p. 342. The original, of pure gold, is more than twice the size of the engraving.

and now Dean of St. Asaph, who, we shall presently see, took considerable interest in the later stages of the affair.

Years passed by, until on the 11th of October, 1833, Mr. Langford, then tenant of the farm, who had himself heard the vision related by the old woman, gave orders for the reduction of the goblin heap, in order to level his field for the plough. While carrying out his instructions, the workmen discovered, at a depth of from four to six feet from the surface, the remains of what must doubtless, at one time, have been a rudely formed *cist-vaen*. The body which once reposed there had long returned to its parent dust, nothing but the skull and a few inferior bones remaining of what once was, doubtless, a "prince and a leader among his people." The warrior—for such he surely was when in life—had been laid in the tomb, "with his martial cloak about him," in the shape of an elegant *CORSLET*, or breast-plate, of virgin gold, embossed throughout after a curious pattern. Independent of its intrinsic value, the time spent on its manufacture and delicate ornamentation, must have rendered it a badge fit only for the breast of an exalted chieftain, and such was surely the warrior whose form it once graced. Verily, in the glowing words of the prophetic old lady, the wearer of that *CORSLET*, in his breastplate of gold, must have "shone like the sun!"

The Dean of St. Asaph, then Vicar of Mold, as before observed, took a lively interest both in the presage and the discovery; and in a letter to John Gage, Esq., Director of the Society of Antiquaries, in 1835, communicated the following valuable particulars, which were afterwards printed in vol. 26 of the *Archæologia* :—

"Sir,—I beg leave to acquaint you with the result of my inquiries relative to the discovery of a golden *CORSLET* near this town (Mold), which I understand is now purchased for the British Museum. The spot where it was found is a small gravel-bank, of which there are several at a little distance from the River Alun, in the Vale of Mold. This spot is about a quarter of a mile from the town of Mold, the road from which place to Chester is cut through part of the bank, within eight or ten yards of the site of the interesting remains. This road was probably the ancient road to this part of the country from the neighbourhood of Chester, as the nature of the ground, both above and below the bridge over the Alun (within a quarter of a mile), being very marshy, must have rendered a passage, otherwise than near the present bridge, often impracticable, before the drainage of late years took place. A short time before the discovery of the *CORSLET*, workmen had been employed in raising gravel from the side of the road, and had made a considerable pit for some yards into the adjoining field. A new tenant, Mr. John Langford, having taken the field, and the pit being unsightly, he employed persons to fill up the hole by shovelling down the top of the bank. While so employed, they observed that the whole of the materials with which they were filling the gravel pit, appeared to consist of larger stones than the material of the gravel below, and among them were several very large round stones. About four feet from the top of the bank,

and without doubt upon the original surface, they perceived the *CORSLET*.\* It lay as it would have been worn, with the breast upwards, the back parts doubled behind, and contained within it a considerable number of small bones, vertebræ, &c., but none of them longer than from two to three inches. The skull, of *no* unusual size, lay at the upper end, but no bones of the extremities were noticed. These bones had no symptoms of fire upon them. The *CORSLET* was very resplendent. Upon it, in rows, lay a quantity of beads, some of which I saw, but cannot now procure one. They were evidently made of some kind of resin, as they broke bright and clear, and burned well, with the smell of that substance. There were also remains of coarse cloth or serge, which, from its appearing connected with or inclosing the beads, formed, I should suppose, their covering, and was fastened round the edges or open parts of the *CORSLET* as a braiding. Some small holes in the edge of the gold, create an idea that this braiding was fastened on through *them*. There are also several pieces of copper, upon which the gold had been rivetted with small nails, and which had served as a stiffening or inner case of the armour. Some of these pieces are still in Mr. Langford's possession. A quantity of what was apparently iron rust, or iron completely decayed, was the only further relic worthy of observation. From the general appearance of the place, there cannot, I think, be a doubt but that the body was laid in its armour upon the surface of a small natural mound of gravel, and from three to four hundred loads of stones were piled upon and around it. The gold might possibly have preserved the bones within it, while those of the extremities entirely decayed. But while the chieftain's bones were thus committed to the ground, unconsumed and apparelled as in life, it was not so with his followers. From two to three yards from the spot where he lay an urn was found, but unfortunately was broken to pieces by the workmen, and more than a wheelbarrow full of the remnants of burnt bones and ashes within it. Some small pieces of these bones have been examined by an experienced surgeon, who has no doubt of their being human. A quantity also of wood-charcoal was found, which was like sponge, and when pressed discharged a black fluid. Some of the largest of the stones which had been heaped together were from eight to ten hundred pounds in weight, one or two of these being close to the *CORSLET*.

"Connected with this subject (observes the Dean) it is certainly a strange circumstance that an elderly woman, who had been to Mold to lead her husband home late at night from a public-house, should have seen or fancied a spectre to have crossed the road before her to the identical mound of gravel 'of unusual size, and clothed in a coat of gold, which shone like the sun,' and that she should tell the story the next morning, many years ago, amongst others, to the very person, Mr. John Langford, whose workmen drew the treasure out of its prison-house. Her having related this story is an undoubted fact. I cannot, however, learn that there was any tradition of such an interment having taken place; though possibly this old woman might have heard of something of the kind in her youth, which still dwelt upon her memory, and, associated with the common appellation of the bank 'Bryn-yr-Ellyllon' (the Goblin's Hill), and a very general idea that the place was haunted, presented the golden effigy to her imagination.

"I regret to say, in conclusion, that the *CORSLET* suffered considerable

\* Accompanying the paper in the *Archæologia* are two well-executed engravings of this curious ornament; our own illustration is copied from one of these.

mutilation. Mr. Langford, upon its discovery, having no idea of its value, threw it into a hedge, and told the workmen to bring it with them when they returned home to dinner. In the mean-time several persons broke small pieces of it;\* and after I saw it, one piece of gold, apparently a shoulder strap, which was entire, was taken away; two small pieces of what I believe to have been the other shoulder strap, with several small pieces of copper upon which the gold was fixed, are still in Mr. Langford's possession. Several rings and breast-pins have been made out of the pieces carried away."

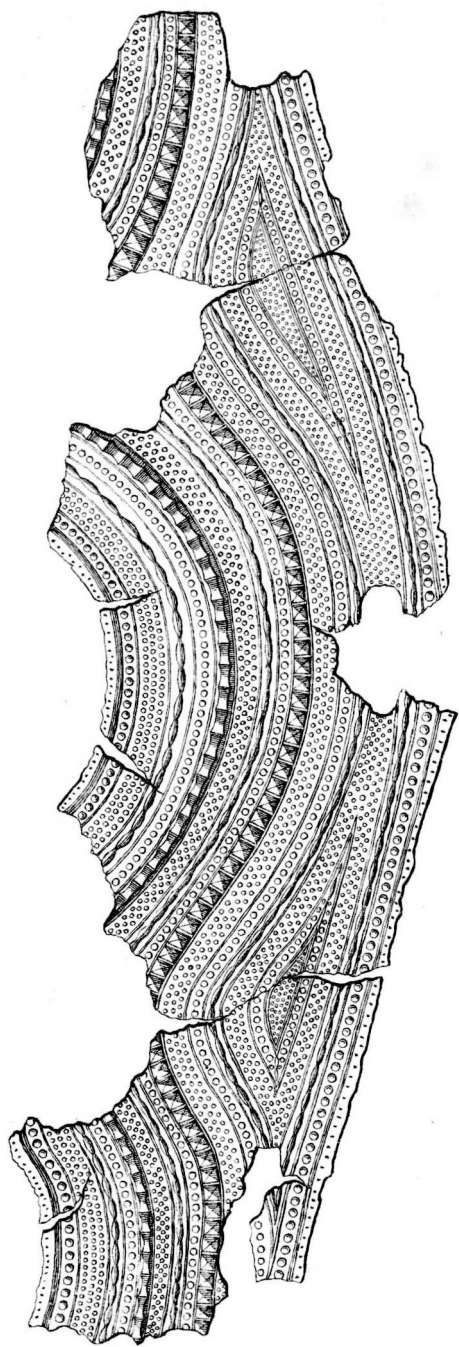
Thus far Dean Clough.† The CORSET itself is in the British Museum,

\* One of these fragments found its way to a watchmaker at Stockport,—who had resided at Mold,—and was purchased from him, in 1847, by the Rev. Thomas Hugo, F.S.A., in whose possession (December, 1856) it still remains. In a letter received from Mr. Hugo, while these pages were in type, that gentleman remarks:—"The object is usually called a 'Corslet,' or 'breastplate,' though that designation is so far incorrect, as signifying a piece of defensive armour. The present object was worn simply as an ornament, and was fastened to the garment beneath it, by means of the punctures thickly scattered along the line of either extremity. My fragment was evidently a portion of the upper edge, occupying a place just below the throat of the wearer, and contains some of the punctured holes already referred to. I am of opinion that this very interesting relic is not anterior in age to A.D. 400, and that indeed it may be the work of the following century. I would be understood, however, to speak with diffidence on a matter about which a dogmatic assertion is most undesirable."

† The Dean of St. Asaph, who, while Vicar of Mold, communicated these particulars to the Society of Antiquaries, has obligingly favoured us with the following additional observations:—"After the Corslet was discovered, the ground was levelled and ploughed over, and the surface is not distinguishable from the rest of the field. I suspect however that, were search made among the neighbouring mounds of gravel, they would furnish a supply of remains worthy the attention of the antiquary. It has always struck me as a strange circumstance, that no record seems to exist among our Bards (so fond of distinguishing warriors by the character of their accoutrements, as well as deeds of prowess,) of this most remarkable and probably unique vestment. The wearer must, in his day, have been more renowned for his dress even than for his feats of arms. In all probability, he must have been slain in defending the passage of the river against the inroads of the enemy, and that *successfully*; otherwise his body would have been carried off by his defeated followers to some of the neighbouring fastnesses. The beauty and elaborate nature of the workmanship upon the Corslet may create a doubt whether it could have been manufactured in Wales, though I do not deny that the material *might* have been procured there. At the present day however, very large sums have been laid out upon trials for gold, and I suspect that the result of an outlay of several thousands of pounds will not produce a sufficient quantity to manufacture a similar ornament. I have a piece of the *edge* of the Corslet now in my possession, about three-quarters of an inch long, perforated with holes, which was given to me a few weeks ago at Mold; but I have never been able to procure one of the (amber?) beads, of which there were at first scores, or rather hundreds, thrown away. As for the ghost story, I can only say, that the facts stated by me were perfectly true, and that the old woman, with whom I was very well acquainted, was as little likely to have fancies about apparitions as any one I know. I have seen several remarks upon the facts in my former statement, deducing different conclusions from them to those I had advanced; but I cannot say that I have noticed any arguments which have at all convinced me that the views I entertained were wrong."







N. J. Beilby's lith.

**GOLD CORSLET**  
**FOUND AT MOLD, FLINTSHIRE.**

*[Width of Original, Three feet one inch and a quarter.]*

saving only such portions as were broken off and pilfered, prior to its becoming the property of the nation. Some of the pieces so abstracted were afterwards recovered, either by purchase or otherwise; and I have just secured another small piece, about two inches long, which our friend, Mr. Hawkins, Keeper of the Antiquities in the British Museum (one of your honorary members), requested me to purchase, with the like intent, from Mr. Thomas Lowe, of this city. I have had a reduced sketch made of the larger portion now preserved in the British Museum,—carefully copied from the *Archæologia*,—in order to delineate the pattern of the embossing, and the general character of the ornament itself. The CORsLET is now somewhat more complete than here shown, owing to some of the fragments having been subsequently restored. It weighs about 18 ounces,—its extreme length being 3 feet  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches, and its width in the centre *eight* inches. When perfect, and on the breast of the wearer, it must indeed have been a splendid embellishment of the person, and in the broad light of day, to repeat the old lady's metaphor, must have “shone like the sun!”

*Who* was the original possessor of the CORsLET is a question which we of the present day cannot pretend to answer. Certainly he was in life a personage of the very highest rank and importance; and it is supposed must have died in the true faith of a Christian, from his body having been buried entire, instead of being first “*burned and urned*,” as was the recognized style of later Pagan sepulture.\* Dr. Owen Pughe, a Welsh antiquary

\* This position, which is espoused by Ab Ithel (the Rev. J. Williams) in his article on this subject in the *Archæologia Cambrensis*, is not without its difficulties. Ab Ithel evidently confounds, in one place, the contents respectively of the *urn* and of the *grave*, and argues therefrom that the interment took place in Christian times, and probably about the 6th or 7th century. Upon this subject, our Society's Historic Secretary, Mr. W. Wynne Ffoulkes, pertinently observes:—“I think Mr. Williams is wrong in his idea of the period to which the interment belonged. He also misapprehends some of the facts, in considering the spongy charcoal to have been probably pieces of a coffin. If *charcoal* was found, it was, to say the least of it, highly improbable that such could be any portion of a coffin. If it was, how could it become *charcoal*? But the fact was this,—charcoal was not found with the inhumed body upon which the Corslet lay, but with the *urn* found two or three yards from the Corslet. Most probably the interment was prior to the Christian era; yet the proof of this would depend much upon the relative position of the two interments. But I think, from all that has been written, the probabilities are in favour of its belonging to the Pagan period. In connection with the name of the supposed owner of the Corslet, Mr. Williams quotes a passage from the ‘*Englynion y Beddau*’ out of the *Myvyrian Archaeology*, Vol. i. p. 80, which has a strange coincidence of circumstantial description and name:—

‘The grave of Alun,—thy form is seen yonder by the rolling stream;  
On the declivity  
Is the grave of Rhun the son of Alun.’

The vicinity of ‘the rolling stream,’—the situation ‘on the declivity,’—and the name

of repute, imagines the grave may have been that of Benlli Gawr, an exalted chieftain of the "days of old," but other authorities have disputed the appropriation. My safest plan, therefore, will be to leave that point in the same state of glorious uncertainty in which I found it, for, in my case,

Where ignorance is bliss,  
'Twere folly to be wise.

To return to the GHOST STORY. It is a curious fact, that this is not the only case on record, in which peculiar circumstances have prefaced or induced the discovery of hid treasure. At Largo, in Fifeshire, a tumulus existed, which popular tradition had long declared to be filled with riches in abundance. NORRIE'S LAW, as the mound was called, was reputed to contain "a warrior and his steed, in an erect position; that he was the chief of a great army, and that he was buried in his armour of *massive silver*. Singular as it may appear, in 1817, the tumulus was opened, when, to the wondering eyes of the barrow-diggers was revealed a quantity of armour of *massive silver*, in accordance with the faithful voice of tradition!

Another equally curious incident is related by Bishop Gibson, in his edition of *Camden's Britannia*, published in 1695, as having occurred within his own knowledge at Ballyshannon, in Ireland:—"In the Ashmolean Museum a gold plate is preserved, which was found in the latter part of the seventeenth century near Ballyshannon, solely in consequence of the song of a blind harper, who chanced to come in whilst the Bishop of Derry (Doctor Hopkins) was at dinner. The Bishop desiring to know the purport of his lay, the herdsman was called in as interpreter, and explained it to be this:—That at a certain spot a man of gigantic stature lay buried, his breast and back covered with plates of gold, and large golden rings upon his fingers. On digging at the place indicated, this plate, still to be seen at Oxford, and another, were found." The harper was evidently singing some venerable tradition of his bardic forefathers!

No ornament aualagous to our CORSLER has, so far as *I* can ascertain, ever been discovered in England; but in the sister kingdom, a somewhat

of *Alun* (the present name of the river) are curious coincidences, which are very applicable to the circumstances of the discovery of the Corslet; but I do not think we can say more. In the quotation, *Alun* is the name of a man,—the river which flows past Mold is also called by the same name, and often formerly spelt the same way. But how the river obtained this name we do not know, and it is very unusual to find a river called after the name of a man. Were it not that it is not in keeping with the general style of the '*Englynion y Beddau*'—as far as I know them by quotation—I should have attempted to conjecture that *Alun* was the name of a place or district,—that 'the grave of *Alun*' meant the grave *in* *Alun*, and that it was the grave of *Rhun*, the son of *Alun*,—the son, that is, of that district,—just as in poetry you might speak of '*Cestria's son*,' when meaning a leading person in Chester. But such a conjecture would, I believe, be contrary to the general tenor of those poems, which commemorate the graves of the most celebrated Cymric chieftains."

similar decoration, also of *gold*, is stated to have been found at Lismore. This was purchased by a goldsmith of Cork for £600, by whom I presume it was melted down, in dread of being subjected to the obnoxious law of "treasure trove,"—a "vested right" which has done more in past times to cripple the study and pursuits of Archæology than we can at all, in the present day, estimate.

We shall close our notes on this curious relic with one of a wholly different character, —which, indeed, were the arguments therein clearly substantiable, would be "a heavy blow and great discouragement" to all the learned speculations previously set forth! Mr. T. N. Brushfield, Medical Superintendent of the Cheshire Lunatic Asylum, who has paid much attention to discoveries in Celtic tumuli, suggests that the ornament *may not be a Corslet at all!* but that in all probability it was "the outer coating of a shield, used by some chief of rank, to distinguish him from his followers." Mr. B. further reminds us that "the shields of the Britons were usually made of wicker-work, or wood, covered with a thin layer of metal, and having in the centre a projecting boss, the cavity of which was occupied by the hand,—and that the ornamentation of this relic is very similar to that upon shields supposed to be of the same period." Now, it will be evident at a glance, that the ornament, as depicted in our engraving, can never have served to any such use,—there is nothing in its shape or construction at all approximating to a shield,—no boss or projection of any sort at its centre. On the contrary, its very form, enlarging gusset-wise at the breasts, and contracting gradually at the neck, together with the notice, in Dean Clough's letter, of the shoulder-straps said to have been attached to it when found,—all combine to prove that it was an ornament designed for the person; while the bones and skull found with it show that it was so worn by its owner when he and his breastplate were consigned to their princely grave.

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