

XI.—*On a Medieval Water-Ewer of Metal, in the form of a mailed horseman, discovered near Hexham, Northumberland.* By EDWARD CHARLTON, M.D., Sec.

ABOUT fifteen years ago, a man walking down the bed of a rivulet which runs into the South Tyne about four miles west of Hexham, observed a piece of metal projecting from the bank. Disengaging it from the clay in which it was imbedded, he found it to be the figure of a mounted warrior, cast in bronze or mixed metal, and hollow. The discovery was for some time concealed, and the finder parted with his prize to a neighbouring farmer for five pounds; and after the death of this individual it came into the hands of Mr. Robert Stokoe, of Hexham, by whose permission the accompanying drawing has been made.

The figure represents a mounted knight, clad in chain or ring armour, beneath a chequered surcoat. It is of mixed yellow metal, and measures about eleven inches long, by thirteen inches in height. The height of the horse at the shoulder is seven inches. The whole figure is hollow, and has evidently been intended for a vessel to contain liquid. The top of the helmet is lost; but it is apparent from the ring at the back part, that there was a species of hinge there, and that the flat lid or crown of the helmet was hasped on to the ornament in front. The visor of the helm is closed, and the ornaments upon it, as well as the general shape of the head-piece, correspond exactly with those worn about the commencement of the thirteenth century. The eye-slits are adorned at either end with



C. Simms
sculp.

Water Vessel of Bronze.

Date 13th Cent. Found in the Tyne. Height 13½ in.

Pub^d by G. Bell Fleet St London.

trefoils, and the same design is observable upon the hasp at the top of the helmet, from whence a raised line descends to form the perpendicular limb of the cross. The air-holes below the eye-slits are ranged in three converging lines of two, three, and four holes. The body is clothed in ring or chain armour, without the elbow or knee-pieces, which are found upon the earliest known English brass, that of Sir John d'Aubernon, A.D. 1277. Above the mail armour, which terminates over the hands in chain mits or fingerless gloves of steel rings, we find the surcoat, a sleeveless garment with a short skirt open in front, and confined round the waist by a narrow belt or cord. The surcoat is here ornamented with a border, and the whole garment is divided by diagonal lines into a checquered pattern, in the interspaces of which are graven the fleur-de-lis, and the star of six rays. A shield, which is now lost, has been affixed by two pins of brass to the left arm, while in the right hand there has been held either a sword or a lance. No vestige of a sword or scabbard can be discovered over or under the surcoat. The legs of the figure are broken off about midway between the ankle and the knee.

The horse is evidently an animal of great power, such as would be required to bear the heavy armour in which its master is encased.

The saddle is peaked before and behind, and is fastened by a bellyband and strap passing round the chest of the horse. Upon this strap we observe three rosettes, and there are two more below the ears on the bridle. The pattern on the straps and on the border of the surcoat is a frequent one on the tombs of the thirteenth century.

There is considerable spirit in the whole design, and the knight sits well in his saddle, the attitude of the horse is, however, much less happy. In its forehead is a raised projection, forming a pipe, communicating with the body of the animal.^a

We are not aware that any other examples of this peculiar and elegant form of ewer or water-vessel in bronze have been met with in this country. The only one at all resembling it, is that figured by Lorentz Diderich

^a In the chest of the horse there is inserted a square plate, now somewhat loosened. The core of the mould has no doubt been removed through this opening after the figure was cast.

Klüwer in his work entitled *Norske Mindesmaerker*, published at Christiania, in 1823.—The description of his figure (given at plate XI.) is as follows:—"A third figure of this kind which is said to have been dug up at Helgeland, represents a knight in mail armour, with a surcoat above. (*Stridskappe over*) His helmet is closed, he bears a drawn sword, and rides on a pied horse. The figure is ten inches long, and the horse is six inches high (at the shoulder)."

Klüwer's figure is far from being as exact as his description.

To what purpose then, were these singularly shaped vessels adapted?—Were they imitations from the antique, or copied from Eastern types brought home by the Crusaders? Such types exist in the East at the present day, and seem to have been used there from the very earliest period. Grotesque bottles in the shape of animals are still to be met with in many countries of the East. It has been suggested that these bronze figures were used for lamps, the oil being poured in at the superior aperture, while the wick was passed through the opening below. This mistake originated, we believe, with Professor Sjöborg, who described the lion of bronze with the Runic inscription, now in the Copenhagen Museum, as having been used as a lamp. This adaptation is, however, denied by Finn Magnussen, who maintains that these, and all similar vessels, of which there are many examples in the Copenhagen Museum, and in Iceland, were used as 'Vand Karren' or ewers for pouring water over the hands of the priest during mass. Such at least is the general tradition in Iceland. On referring to the catalogue of the Copenhagen Museum, in the fourth volume of the *Antiquariske Annaler*, we find that No. 1412 is "a lion of metal, excellently well preserved, of the kind that was used in the Catholic worship at mass as a water-ewer. Around the head and depending on either side of the neck is a species of mane. On the top of the head is a quadrangular hole with a cover, into which the water was poured, and one ear forms a spout by which it was emptied. The tail of the animal is bent up over the back, and terminates in a winged dragon which bites the lion in the neck, the dragon thus completing the handle whereby the vessel is lifted. In the breast of the lion there is inserted a square piece of metal, through which no doubt the core was

extracted after the figure was cast. The museum possesses many such vessels, but this is the best preserved and of the choicest workmanship."

In the same catalogue (No. 1703) is "a water vessel of metal, in the form of a horse, with a large handle formed of a snake which bends itself over the horse's back and bites the animal's neck. The aperture for receiving the water is on the top of the head, while in the forehead of the horse is a spout through which it was emptied. This figure has been no doubt intended for the same purpose as Nos. 1412, 1421."

It has been suggested by Finn Magnussen that these ewers were not originally destined for the service of the church, but that they were a part of the household utensils of wealthy families, and were perhaps employed for cleansing the fingers of the guests at our ancestors' rude repasts. As mere liquor decanters they would be clumsy and almost useless, the small size of the aperture would only permit a small stream to flow out, to fill the goblets or wine-cups of the guests. On the other hand, when borne by an attendant, this would be most appropriate for cleansing the fingers of those who had been discussing the various viands, and when subsequently devoted to the service of the church, would be well fitted for the different ablutions of the fingers of the celebrant during the service of the Mass.

We have positive proof that these vessels were occasionally devoted to sacred purposes, from the inscription on the bronze lion formerly in the church of Vatnisfiord, in Iceland, and now preserved in the Copenhagen Museum. It is thus described in No. 1421 of the catalogue of that unrivalled collection.—"A large lion of metal, of the kind generally believed to have been a water-vessel used in the service of the church (Kirkens Vandkar). It is fourteen inches long, and twelve inches high, and of much better workmanship than these vessels generally are. There is a square hole with a small cover on the top of the head for pouring in the water, which found its exit through a double spout in the animal's mouth. There has been a handle to this figure as in other specimens, as is evidenced by a screw hole in the neck, but this handle is now lost. The mane is boldly relieved. In front of the animal's chest is a shield, on which is engraved the following inscription in Runic:—This lion is given to God's service, and to St. Olaf of Vatsfiord, by Thorvalti and by Thordisa."

We learn from the Icelandic annalists that Thorvald Snorrason of Vatnsfiord, married, in the year 1224, Thordisa, a daughter of Iceland's great historian, Snorro Sturleson. Thorvald died in 1229, and the lion must therefore have been presented to the church by the parties during the five years of their wedded life.

Another figure of this kind is described in No. 524 of the same catalogue.—“A lion of metal. Around its neck is a collar or band, to which a shield is fastened; and on this shield is engraved a bishop with an episcopal staff. This figure formerly stood in the church of Indslov, and belongs to the class of water vessels, which in the earlier Catholic times (aeldre Katholske Tid) were employed in the administration of the sacraments.

Two more ewers of this kind are figured by Kluwer in his *Norske Mindesmaerker*, plate II. The first of these was found near Tronyem, in an open field, at a little depth below the surface of the ground. It represents a monster with a beak and wings (qu: a griffin). In its beak it bears a man in a surcoat with boots^p and spurs, and with a closed helmet. The whole figure is cast in bronze, and weighs five pounds. It is hollow within, and there is an opening in the neck of the animal, which has been closed by a cover; and there is another opening (the spout) in the back part of the helmet of the man carried in the beast's jaws.

“Another of these figures” says Klüwer, “has been long preserved at Molde, in Norway. It represents a unicorn, and there is a hole in the neck on which there has evidently been a cover. The horn of the animal is hollow, and forms a pipe ending in a spout. There is a kind of handle over the back, formed by a serpent, from whence we may conclude that it has been used as an ewer.”

Kluwer adds that several figures of this kind yet remain in Iceland, and are there used as tea and coffee-pots! on grand occasions.

The only English specimens which have been described are two lions in the possession of the Earl of Shrewsbury; another recently added to the Medieval Collection in the British Museum; and a singular variety recently found in an old vault at Hoddam, in Scotland. This last is in the form of a lion statant, with a stag's head issuing from its breast. It is

composed of mixed yellow metal or bronze, and measures about twelve inches in height and in length. Upon the head of the lion is a square opening, covered by a hinge lid, and behind the horns on the stag's head is a small round hole, which probably served as an exit for the water. To the back of the lion is attached a nondescript animal, forming a kind of handle.

We saw another lion ewer exposed for sale in the summer of 1851, in a shop in Wardour-street.

We have no doubt that several other figures of the same character are to be found in continental museums, and will be described by antiquaries now that attention has been directed to them. In Wagener's *Handbuch der vorzüglichsten in Deutschland entdeckten Alterthümer; Weimar, 1842*, three or four figures of the above kind are engraved. Plate XIX, No. 172, exhibits a lion ewer at Brunswick; Plate LXIV, No. 683, a lion, with a figure for a handle, at Königin Grätz; No. 980 is a horse-ewer, at Prague; No. 1056, a cat or lioness ewer, at Schlerbitz. We believe that all the above described ewers, from the mailed knight to the one last recorded, are of nearly similar date, though there is much difference in the style of workmanship and design. Their date can we think justly be referred to the commencement of the thirteenth century, the original designs may possibly have been brought by Crusaders from the East, but the figures themselves are probably of European manufacture.

EDWARD CHARLTON.