

LEADEN BOX AND CROSSES FROM RICHMOND.

WE beg to call the attention of the members of the Society to a curious relic of antiquity recently discovered at Richmond, and which has been kindly placed in our hands by Sir William Lawson, Bart., of Brough Hall.

It is a small leaden box, and was picked up on the 9th of March last, near the river Swale, amongst the *débris* and rubbish cast out of the Castle yard at Richmond, while levelling the ground there for the Barrack lately built therein. The person who found the box picked it up close to the river side, and in a hurry, no doubt, to get at the treasures contained within it, he broke it open by means of a stone, and thereby scattered much of the powder it contained, and in all probability likewise broke the glass, as he only found the glass in fragments in the box. The box was firmly soldered down, so that it required some violence to open it. It is of lead, about 1-10th of an inch thick, $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches long by $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in breadth, and about an inch in depth.

It contained four rude leaden crucifixes, of a plain Latin form, and a quantity of fine greyish calcareous powder, and the whole was probably covered over on the top beneath the lead by a plate of thick greenish glass, of which several fragments remain.¹

The four small leaden crucifixes are extremely rudely cast; and what is also interesting, they have all been cast or struck in different moulds. On one side of each of them is the figure of our Lord; on the reverse are what may be considered rude attempts at characters, but none of them are legible to us, and indeed we doubt much if they are characters at all. We might suggest that they were intended for the instruments of the Passion of our Lord, were it not that they do not bear the most distant resemblance to the ordinary representations of such objects. The crucifixes were probably laid upon, or were imbedded in, the light-coloured calcareous earth, which probably filled up the box. We have examined this earth with a powerful microscope, but can detect in it no fragments of animal matter; it seems to consist of clay, with fragments

¹ The glass was found in fragments in the box; there was quite enough of it to have formed a plate across the box above the earth, which nearly filled one half of the whole. The glass has a peculiar beryl tint by reflected light; its surface is rougher, and its texture coarser than that of our modern plate glass. On shewing it to a person well acquainted with the varieties of modern glass, he at once unhesitatingly pronounced it to be of ancient manufacture.

of heavy spar or gypsum. From the form of the crystals, which are however very minute, we should consider them to be sulphate of lime or gypsum, a much more likely substance to be found in ordinary soil than the sulphate of barytes. On adding muriatic acid a certain effervescence takes place, but the majority of the white masses are not dissolved. We are not able to discover amid this earth traces of any animal matter whatsoever.

How are we then to account for the extraordinary care with which these crosses and the dust have been guarded? The box has evidently been coated with pitch or with bitumen, as portions of this can be found on every part where the lead has not been exposed by recent scraping with a knife. The precise spot where the box was turned up is of course unknown, but the scite of the Castle Chapel was much disturbed during the excavations for building the Barracks. In all probability the box had been interred with some person who had been buried there, and all else had perished around it. The burial of the carefully soldered leaden box, containing objects in themselves of such little intrinsic value, would indicate that some peculiar sanctity or veneration was attached to the objects in question, and it was suggested at first, that the earthy matter probably was the dust from the tomb of a saint, or perhaps a portion of the remains themselves. This, however, is completely disproved by the chemical and microscopical investigation of the earth in question; for it contains no animal remains whatsoever. Nor would this account for the four leaden crosses so carefully preserved. A cross of gold, silver, or even of lead, was often buried with the corpse of an ecclesiastic or great personage, as is the case even at the present day, but in such instances a single cross was placed on the breast of the corpse.

In the middle ages the pilgrims who had visited various shrines, returned bearing with them leaden tokens of various shapes and device, indicative of the spots they had visited, and purchased at the time of their attendance at the shrine or holy place. In an elaborate paper by C. Roach Smith, *On Pilgrims' Signs and Leaden Tokens*, published in the first volume of the *Journal of the British Archæological Association*, we find a full description of many of these signs or tokens² which have

² The leaden signs and tokens are alluded to by Erasmus in his Colloquy of the Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake, as also by Chaucer, or rather by the author of the Supplement to the Canterbury Tales, and by the author of Pierce Ploughman's Vision.

"An hundred of Ampulles
On his hat seten
Signes of Synay
And shells of Galice
And many a crouch on his cloak

And keyes of Rome
And the vernycle bfore
For men should know
And se bi hise signes
Whom he sought hadde."

Vision of Pierce Ploughman, l. 3533, Wright's edition.

been discovered in London and elsewhere. Some of them bear inscriptions indicating from whence they came—as St. Thomas of Canterbury—Amiens in France, &c. None of these, however, seem to have been in the shape of a cross or crucifix, and may we not be justified in the supposition, that this, the holiest sign of our redemption, was chiefly reserved to indicate those who had visited the Holy Places in Judea? Great quantities of these tokens, which had been laid on various shrines, were no doubt occasionally brought home; but the fact of four crosses of different moulds being placed in the same casket, would indicate that the pilgrim with whose corpse these were interred had obtained these crosses at various places sanctified by the memory of our Saviour's life, or possibly at distinct spots in Jerusalem venerated as the localities of the respective stages of his Passion.

The earth in the box we may with justice suppose to have been brought by the pilgrim from the Holy Land. No higher privilege could be accorded than that of burial in the Campo Santo at Pisa, in earth brought specially from Jerusalem; and may we not imagine, that, next to interment in the sacred earth itself, the devout pilgrim valued the possession of a small quantity of that soil which had been watered by the blood of Christ, and wished it to be interred with him in the grave?

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