

UMBO OF A ROMAN SHIELD FOUND NEAR MATFEN.

A FEW meetings ago we had the pleasure of exhibiting to the Society the article here noticed, with the view of ascertaining the purpose to which it had been devoted. At that time it was our impression that it was the brazen boss of a shield, and though we were probably then in error as to the real nature of the material, we believe we were correct as to its probable use. It did not excite much attention at the time, for many even doubted its having any claim to be considered an antique at all. On shewing it afterwards to Sir W. Trevelyan, he immediately detected the existence of an inscription which had before escaped our notice on the flat external rim, and Mr. Albert Way has called our attention to a similar boss found some years ago in Lancashire.

The article in question was discovered about 30 years ago by some labourers in draining a field near Matfen. It lay about 3 feet underground, and was unaccompanied by any other relics of old times. The men who found it looked on it as the top or cover of a brass vessel which would no doubt contain treasure, and we are told that they devoted a day or two afterwards to trenching the spot to secure the expected prize.

The old cover, as it was no doubt called, was then wondered at, and hung up in the farm house; and every Saturday was submitted to a most careful polishing by the gudewife, who certainly thereby enhanced the brilliancy of the auld piece of brass, but by no means improved the inscription, and perhaps even obliterated other marks upon the boss.

In shape this boss presents the usual flat surface to fit the wood of the shield, and a central projection of unusually large size. Indeed it was considerable time before we could bring ourselves to believe in its original use, as, with the exception of some Scandinavian shields in the Christiana Museum, we had never seen any bosses so prominent. The diameter of the whole is $8\frac{2}{10}$ inches; that of the boss is $4\frac{1}{10}$ inches. The prominence of the boss is about $2\frac{1}{3}$ in.; the thickness of the metal is greatest in the projecting part, and materially thinner at the edge. The breadth of the flat rim is almost exactly two inches. The rim appears to have been turned in a lathe, and is formed into three divisions by circular double lines about half an inch apart. In one of these spaces the inscription is found. Four holes are seen in the rim, through which square nails have evidently been driven to attach it to the wood of the shield.

The material of which this relic is composed appears at first sight to

be brass, but its deep golden hue, and mellow tone when struck, shews, even without the aid of chemical analysis, that it is in reality yellow bronze, a material which seems frequently to have been used by the Romans in Great Britain. Mr. Thomas Wright has remarked that the Roman bronze, "under certain circumstances, especially when it has lain in the water where it was subjected to friction, bears an extraordinary resemblance to gold." The polishing in the present case is probably due in a great measure to the weekly rubbings it underwent during the many years it hung in the farmer's kitchen. Its colour is deeper than in the bronze strainer in the museum of the Society.

The boss or umbo in this instance is certainly of unusual size, but, if we mistake not, it is exceeded by that figured at p. 457 of Whitaker's *History of Richmondskire*, and described there as having been found about the year 1800 near Garstang, in Lancashire, on the line of the Roman road to Lancaster. Here the diameter of the umbo is more by an inch and quarter than that of the present specimen, and the margin is not so broad, so that the whole diameter is somewhat less. Four holes, as here, are visible in the flat rim, for attaching the umbo to the wood of the shield. The Garstang umbo, which is now in the British Museum, is covered over with figures of great interest, and engraved with considerable skill. On the boss is a fine sitting figure of Mars, surmounted by a wreath of laurel, and on the rim are two spirited nude figures, an eagle with its claw upon a globe, and other curious emblems.

The specimen before us exhibits no signs of art-workmanship, except that in the central band of the rim there is a short inscription rudely struck with a pointed instrument. As far as we are able to decipher the letters, they give the word *NON I P IOVINTI*. Of the first word we are by no means certain; the *D* and the *N* are pretty plain, but the second letter bears some resemblance to *A*. The other letters seem pretty plain, but those more accustomed to the reading of Roman inscriptions may probably correct our reading.

The inscription, we would suggest, may possibly mean that the shield was the gift of Julius Publius Iovintus. In the list of potters' names, given by Mr. Thomas Wright, occurs the name of Iovantus.

Whoever the owner may have been, the shield was probably lost by some Roman soldier in a skirmish to the north of the Wall, from which great barrier the spot where it was found is distant only about two miles. The wood and leather have rotted away long since; the imperishable bronze has handed down to us, in all probability, the name of another defender of the Wall.