

XX.—ON AN ARMLET OF FINE GOLD, FOUND AT SHOTTON.

BY ROBERT MORTON MIDDLETON, JUN.

READ ON WEDNESDAY, THE 30TH JULY, 1884.

THE remarkable ornament which I am now permitted to exhibit was picked up under a gooseberry bush in the garden at Shotton Hall, in the county of Durham, the residence of Ralph Milbanke Hudson, Esq., J.P. It was found by Mr. A. G. M. Hudson, in July or August, 1881, on the day after a thunderstorm, and was partially covered with soil when discovered. Probably it had, some time before, been raised to the surface by the gardener or by the agency of worms, and had been washed out by the heavy rain on the occasion referred to. It may, however, have been dropped by a jackdaw or other bird. After so splendid a discovery, the ground was carefully dug over, but no further object of antiquity was found.

It is by no means easy to assign an approximate date to this relic. Bracelets and armlets of gold are known to have been worn from the early dawn of human history until the present time; and, among many of the nations of antiquity, such ornaments were coveted by kings, chieftains, and famous warriors.

Mr. Franks, F.R.S., and Mr. W. H. Overall, F.S.A. (the accomplished curator of the Guildhall Museum), both express the opinion that this armlet is Roman.

It will be observed that the armlet consists of two widely different styles of metal work, half of it being a rope-like twist of good careful workmanship, and the other half a thicker gold wire, roughly angular, doubled and rudely bent into a half-circular form. The two halves are attached, on the one side by the rope-work being untwisted and wrapped several times directly round the coarser wire, and on the other

by a third short piece of finer angular gold wire, looping the two together in a most clumsy manner. The weight is nearly two ounces, and the intrinsic value about seven pounds.

Two small twisted gold bracelets, exactly of the character of half of this armlet, were found in December, 1842, at New Grange in Ireland, together with "a Denarius of Geta and two other coins of small brass,"<sup>1</sup> which furnish presumptive evidence that the bracelets were themselves of Roman manufacture. They are preserved in the gold ornaments room of the British Museum, where there is also a small bracelet of angular gold wire, like the second half, but it is of uncertain date. Among the Roman antiquities in the National Museum are bronze twisted bracelets, like the twisted half of this one, from Colchester, Lincoln, Icklingham in Suffolk, and London. The York Museum contains a gold twisted bracelet of similar manufacture, and a ruder one of one gold and one silver strand. These ornaments are both believed to be Roman.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the bracelets which I have named have been fastened by a loop at one end, and a hook at the other.

On the whole, I am convinced that the twisted half at least of this fine armlet is late Roman, and that, as it would originally be only about an inch-and-a-half in diameter, it may have graced the wrist of a high-born Roman lady; but that, having passed, perhaps some time afterwards, into ruder hands, it was enlarged by the addition of the second half in order that it might adorn the arm of some Roman or British soldier.

These theories, however, like the question whether the precious metal of which the object is composed was or was not found in Britain, are but speculations. What is of the greatest interest is the fact of the ornament occurring just where we have recently sought for traces of Roman occupation, namely, midway between Seaton Carew and the mouth of the Wear. May we not venture to hope that before long some clearer light may be thrown on the obscure subjects of Roman roads and Salters' tracks in south-east Durham?

<sup>1</sup> See letter from Lord Albert Conyngham, F.S.A., to Sir Henry Ellis, F.R.S., in *Archæol.*, Lond., 1844, Vol. XXX., p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> In the collection of Mr. J. Clayton, F.S.A., is an armlet of Roman work, found in one of the Stations *per lineam Valli*, formed of twisted silver wire.