

ROMAN INTERMENT IN WEST SMITHFIELD.

BY JOHN EDWARD PRICE.

In the course of the extensive excavations for the Finsbury Extension of the Metropolitan Railway, many specimens of Pottery have been exhumed which possess interest as relics of Roman London. Those now to be referred to were found adjoining the remains of a skeleton that had been inclosed in a wooden cist, several feet from the surface of the ground, and the site of their discovery is the north-west corner of Smithfield, not far from West Street, and near where the two inns, the Ram and the Rose, were standing but a short time since.

Roman Antiquities have occasionally been found in this locality, and there have been several instances to prove that it was in use by the Romans as a place of sepulture. At the corner of Clothfair an urn, containing burnt bones, was discovered a few years back, and similar relics have been brought to light in Giltspur Street, in front of St. Sepulchre's Church. During the formation of a new sewer in Cock Lane numerous bone pins, mortaria, Samian ware, and other objects, were found in conjunction with human remains.

In the case of the discovery now to be described, a skeleton was inclosed in a coffin or cist, with a small black urn of Upchurch ware placed at the crown of the skull. The other objects, a patera, ampulla, mortarium, &c., such as are usually found in Roman sepulchres, were near the left-hand side of the cist. There was not sufficient of the wood remaining to measure with accuracy the length of the coffin, but it appeared to have been but little over four feet. It was lying east and west, slightly inclined to the north-east. The body had been placed on small transverse pieces of wood unworked, and of varying thickness; these had the appearance of having been branches of trees cut up into equal lengths. They were lying on the London clay, the bones upon them; and pieces of timber had been placed around to form the sides, head, and foot of the cist, much in the same

way as the tile tombs of the Romans were constructed, which have from time to time been discovered in different parts of London.

Various forms of burial were adopted by the Romans during their sojourn here; such as burning the remains, and placing the ashes on a single tile; depositing them in funeral urns, or burying the body entire, either with or without lime, in coffins of lead, stone, or wood, a practice which after the introduction of Christianity is said to have been more prevalent than that of "cremation." The antiquities are those usually found buried with the deceased in Roman cemeteries, and afford additional evidence of the very uniform plan on which funeral rites were conducted by the survivors. Such vessels are generally found in groups of three and four, and are presumed to have been articles in domestic use forming part of the household property of the defunct. In the present instance they are of the lowest order of ceramic manufacture, but manifest the same plan of burial as that employed by the higher classes. From the position of the body, and the extreme lateness of the pottery, the interment might possibly be referred to the early Christian times, somewhat corroborated by the finding of a small coin of Gratian, having on the reverse "GLORIA NOVI SÆCULI,"—a soldier with a shield and *labarum*, on which appears the monogram of Christ. There was an entire absence of personal ornaments, glass, or any of the higher forms of earthenware, and from the rude character of the pottery it may be assumed that the possessor belonged to the humblest grade of Roman life.

Some few objects of mediæval date were discovered during the progress of the excavations, and the quantities of gravel and sand that were found clearly demonstrated how erroneous is the supposition that in days gone by Smithfield was little better than a marsh or swamp.