

ROMAN SILVER SPOONS, ETC.

A find of a very interesting character was made in the autumn of 1872, in a field between Great Horwood and Winslow. The ploughshare struck the bottom of a small metal vase or pot, and tore it open. It contained some spoons, a fibula or brooch, a pin and a ring,* all of silver, and of Roman type. It was reported that there were five spoons, though only two, with the other articles, have been secured for the Society's Museum. The peculiarity of the spoons is that the bowls are oval, and drop about a quarter of an inch below the long taper shanks, which were originally straight, but which evidently had been rudely bent in order that they might be put into the metal pot. In the bowl of one of the spoons is an inscription, *VENERIA VIVAS*; and it seems as if this spoon had been given to a lady of the name of Veneria, as a birthday or wedding present. The long taper shanks of the spoons were used for drawing snails, etc., out of their shells. This custom is alluded to by Martial (*Martialis Epigramma*, lib., xiv. ep. 121) an old Roman author, B.C. :

“*Sum cochleis habilis, sed nec minus utilis ovis.
Numquid scis potuis cur cochleare vocer ?*”

Pliny in his *Nat. Hist.*, xxviii. c. 2, records the singular practice of either perforating the egg-shell, after its contents have been eaten, with the end of the spoon, or breaking off the bowl of the spoon; “*Huc pertinet ovorum ut exsorbuerit quisque calices cochlearumque protinus frangi aut eosdem cochlearibus perforari.*” Sir Thomas Browne, in his *Vulgar Errors*, 1669, Book V. c. xxi. s. 4, quotes this passage from Pliny, and calls the custom of “breaking the egg-shell after the meat is out, a superstitious relict,” and says that “the intent was to prevent witchcraft.”

C. LOWNDES.

* Photographed by S. G. Payne, Aylesbury.

