

Tom Tiddler's Ground: The Romance of Buried Treasure.

I'm on Tom Tiddler's ground
Picking up gold and silver.



HIS simple rhyme, so familiar to us all from early childhood, might have been appropriately sung by the fortunate discoverers on some of the following occasions, had they had the time or inclination to bestow a thought upon that mysterious being who is supposed to rule over those portions of Mother Earth which yield both "gold and silver" to every individual who is lucky enough to find them.

But on no occasion was this more particularly true than at an extraordinary and important discovery, made by a party of boys one Sunday afternoon in June, 1833, near the village of Beaworth, in Hampshire. While amusing themselves playing marbles, on a small piece of pasture land called the Old Litten, one of them observed a piece of lead sticking up above the surface, in the track of a waggon wheel. Upon stooping to take hold of it, he discovered a small hole, into which he thrust his hand and brought out a number of coins, and his companions immediately followed his example. Considering their discovery to be nothing more than some old buttons, they filled their pockets with as many

and drakes" upon the surface of a pond, just outside the village.

But their movements had by this time attracted the attention of some villagers, who, upon learning the nature of the find, at once hastened to the spot and commenced a regular scramble for the booty. As some of the parties obtained possession of many more than others, the parents of the boys who first discovered the treasure became dissatisfied, and appealed on the following morning to the owner of the land. This gentleman immediately sent to claim all the coins that had been found, which were reluctantly given up, and by the same evening he received upwards of 6,500.

The coins, when originally found, were deposited in an oblong box lined with lead, and according to the villagers' account, they were packed in regular layers. The box itself was so mutilated by the people, in their eagerness to get at all its contents, that only one side and a part of the bottom remained entire. It is probable that it had been broken open by a passing waggon, and that the pressure of the vehicle had forced up the piece of lead which first attracted attention.



SOME OF THE COINS FROM THE BEAWORTH FIND.

as they would hold, and hid a large number in an adjoining field, intending to return for a further supply at some future time. On their way back to the village, they amused themselves by throwing the coins at every bird that happened to cross their path, and not content with this, they utilized many more for producing "ducks

Upon examination, the treasure was found to consist of coins of the reigns of William the Conqueror and William Rufus, many of them being in the most perfect state of preservation. The total number, allowing for those which the boys had scattered, and others which it was known were afterwards sold, was not less than 7,000. The amount which the sale of

the coins realized was most generously distributed by the owner of the land among the discoverers of the treasure and the local charities.

Differing in many respects from the above find, though none the less remarkable, was the discovery made by a sexton and his assistant, at Hexham, in Northumberland, in 1832. The men were employed in preparing a grave, on the west side of the north transept of Hexham Church, and while thus occupied one of them struck upon a vessel, out of which fell a few small coins. From their appearance the men imagined that the vessel contained gold and silver treasure, and their first idea was to secure as much as possible before the event should become known. But the incumbent of the church happening to be near, and seeing that something unusual had occurred, he at once proceeded to the spot and thus prevented any spoliation. Actuated solely by a desire that the best advantage should be taken of what he rightly considered an important discovery, he promptly secured the safety of the whole of the coins.

The vessel, which proved to be a Saxon bucket, was found to contain brass coins, called stycas, of the Anglo-Saxon Kings, Heardalf, Eanred, Ethelred, and Redulf;



SAXON VESSEL IN WHICH THE COINS WERE DISCOVERED AT HEXHAM.

the total number found was estimated at 8,000.

The bucket, here reproduced, is now in the National Collection of Saxon Antiquities. It was much injured by the blows it received



OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF SAXON STYCAS OF KING EANRED, DISCOVERED AT HEXHAM.

from the tools, and is in a very decomposed and dilapidated condition. It does not appear that the vessel ever had a cover, though the coins, when found, were quite



OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF SAXON STYCAS OF KING ETHELRED, DISCOVERED AT HEXHAM.

dry and coated with dust. It is made of brass plate, and decorated with a number of Saxon ornaments round the upper part. The handle is fixed by two heads with pendant drapery, the whole being a remarkably interesting relic of this early period.

It is a curious fact, but none the less true, that many of the most important discoveries of coins have been made by boys, and that, too, in the most accidental and unexpected manner. The following is an example of one of these discoveries, and many more might be given. Imagine the look of surprise and astonishment which must have overspread the face of the small boy who had been sent to mind his master's sheep, at a place called Keeps Hill, near High Wycombe, when, from out a flint, which he had casually picked up on the hillside (for the purpose of grubbing up a mole's track, always a fascinating amusement to a boy), there fell a number of Early British gold coins. Upon examining the stone he discovered that it was hollow, and upon probing the cavity, nine coins more tumbled out. The stone, in size and shape, resembled a large egg, though rather flatter; the cavity, which was tubular, being a natural formation.

Somewhat elated, the boy left the sheep and started off to show the treasure to his master, who at once took possession of the coins; but the boy's father, hearing soon



OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF UNIQUE BRITISH COIN, FOUND NEAR HIGH WYCOMBE.

after of his son's discovery, got possession of them and carried them about for sale.

The date of the coins was about B.C. 35, they were all gold, and of considerable value on account of their rarity and weight. Whatever the object of the person who hid them may have been, he could hardly have hit upon a less suspicious receptacle than the one chosen, as the fact of their having lain hidden for over 1,800 years seems to prove.

The domestic hearth has always been considered a favourite hiding-place for treasure. It is probable, therefore, that the French priest, who was conducting a mission in Dauphiny at the beginning of the present century, was not so very much surprised when he heard from the lips of a young maid-servant her confession of a discovery she had made of a large quantity of gold medals and coins under the hearthstone in an old castle, occupied by a farmer. It appeared from her story that, while she was clearing away the ashes from under the grate, a few coins appeared among them, and this circumstance led her to look for more under the stone, which had been burned through; and under which she found a large number of others. These she had carefully hid, but not knowing what to do with them, and fearing detection, she had been forced to confess. The priest, with an eye to his own interest, told her that as she could not take them for herself, nor sell them without risking their entire loss, she must bring them to him to dispose of in a manner in accordance with the dictates of his conscience; and the girl having brought them, he immediately took them to a goldsmith, who melted them down, and purchased the metal. Of the proceeds, the priest gave a part only to the girl, and with the remainder purchased decorations for his church, and a fine library necessary to a confessor and missionary.

A discovery which created much interest at the time, and is probably the largest on record, was made in the most accidental manner near Tutbury, in Staffordshire, in 1831. In the early part of the summer of that year, a number of workmen were em-

ployed in removing a considerable bank of gravel and sand, a short distance below the bridge over the River Dove, which was causing an obstruction in the water-way. During the operation one of the labourers turned up a few silver coins, and upon digging a second time into the same spot, he, to his great astonishment, turned up a whole shovelful, and disclosed to view an immense number of others. Thereupon a regular fight for the treasure took place, each man appropriating to himself as much as he could possibly carry, and in some cases a little more; for when the overseer, upon learning what had happened, came up, the coins were literally running over out of the men's pockets.

The find consisted of silver pennies of the reigns of Edward I. and Edward II., amount-



OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF COIN OF EDWARD I., FROM TUTBURY FIND.

ing to the enormous number of 200,000 pieces.

The news of the discovery soon spread, and many people visited the scene: some to satisfy a not unnatural curiosity; others, no doubt, in the hope of securing a few of the coins for themselves. But as the spot on which the coins were found was near to the ancient castle of Tutbury (a piece of Crown



OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF COIN OF EDWARD II., FROM TUTBURY FIND.

property, belonging to the Duchy of Lancaster), the find, according to the existing law, belonged to the Crown as treasure-trove. The Chancellor of the Duchy issued a proclamation claiming all the coins found, and prohibiting further search by unauthorized persons; and he also appointed proper officers to proceed with the examination of the unexplored ground. At the same time, with a view to the peace of the neighbourhood, and

in kind consideration of the poor workmen who had been occupying themselves in digging up the treasure, he directed that no proceedings should be taken for the recovery of any money which had been found previous to that time.

The nett result of the search under the

would be compelled to cross the river somewhere in the vicinity in which the coins were found, there being no bridge at Tutbury at the time.

A small but important discovery of treasure, made about the beginning of this century, next claims our attention. It consisted of



ROMAN VESSEL OF SILVER IN WHICH THE TREASURE WAS FOUND.

commission of the Duchy was the discovery of about 1,500 coins and one gold ring.

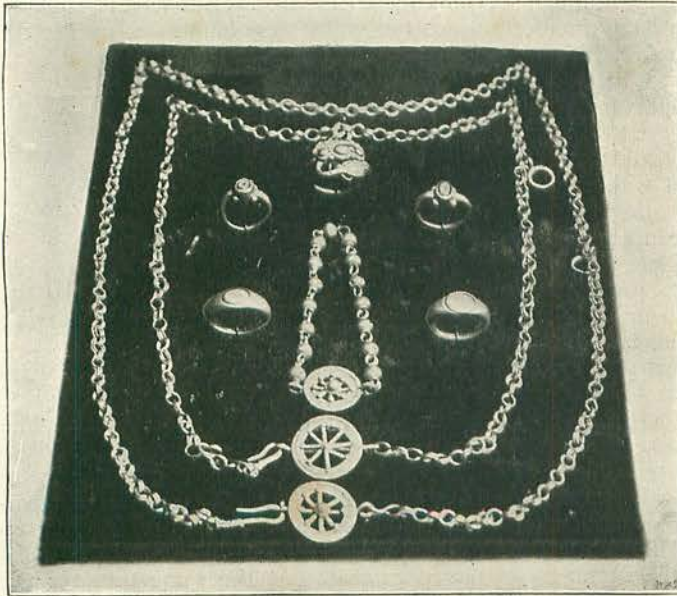
From the very large number of coins found, it has been conjectured that the treasure may have been the contents of the military chest of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, lost in the rapid retreat of his forces, which took place after his defeat by the King's troops at Burton, in 1322. It is known that he fled in this direction after the battle, and

the elegant silver vessel here reproduced, which contained five gold rings, each weighing between 8dwt. and 9dwt., one silver ring, two gold chains, 2ft. 8in. and 2ft. 4in. in length respectively, with wheel-shaped ornaments attached to them, a gold bracelet, a pair of silver-gilt fibulæ, three silver spoons, about 280 Roman denarii, and two large brass coins of Antoninus Pius, in whose reign the treasure was in all probability deposited.

The whole of the articles were in the most perfect condition, and, with the exception of the coins, are supposed to have been connected with the rites and ceremonies of Roman worship, but in what particular way has never been satisfactorily determined.

The exact locality where the discovery was made was cautiously and successfully concealed, in order that the treasure might not be claimed by the Crown. The articles are said to have been hawked about privately, till they were ultimately purchased by a silversmith at Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

The Duchy of Lancaster seems to have been



GOLD CHAINS AND RINGS FOUND IN SILVER VESSEL.

remarkably fortunate with regard to discoveries of treasure, for in 1846 another important find occurred in Lancashire upon property belonging to the Council, which in several respects resembles that which took place at Tutbury. It appears from contemporary accounts that some workmen were employed at a place called Cuerdale, near Preston, carrying earth to fill in a large cavity, which had been hollowed out by the water, in the banks of the River Ribble. While digging for this purpose, a



OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF UNIQUE COIN OF ALFRED THE GREAT, FROM CUERDALE HOARD.

short distance from the banks of the river, they came upon a large mass of silver, consisting of ingots of various sizes, a few armlets, tolerably entire, several fragments, and a few ornaments of some other description, the weight of the whole being about 1,000oz., exclusive of 6,000 or 7,000 coins of various reigns. The treasure had originally been inclosed in a leaden chest, but this was so decomposed, that only a small portion of it could be secured.

This mass of treasure was at once taken

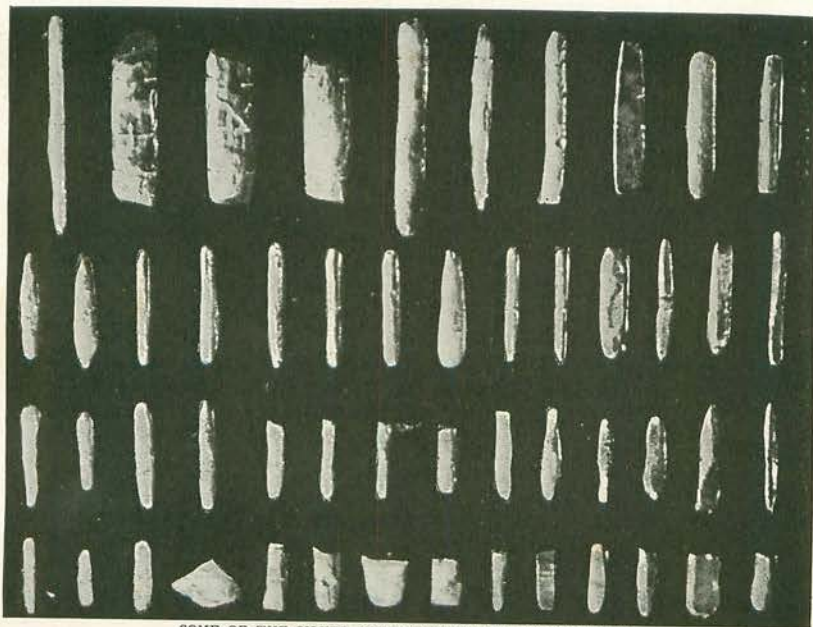
vantageous to the Numismatic and Archæological Sciences.

The majority of the coins were of the reigns of Ethelstan, Alfred, Eadward, St. Edmund, and other Saxon Kings; though a large number were foreign, and many were unknown. A complete series was selected for the National Collection, and packets more or less numerous were presented to various institutions at home and abroad, for the hoard was almost as interesting to several of the Continental countries as it was to England. From

the general appearance of the whole mass, it has been suggested that it was the stock of a dealer in precious metals, who, becoming alarmed during some civil commotion for the safety of his stock-in-trade,



OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF COIN OF CANUTE, FROM CUERDALE HOARD.



SOME OF THE SILVER INGOTS DISCOVERED AT CUERDALE.

had buried it for security until the danger should be passed, and had afterwards been prevented by some calamity from revealing its whereabouts to others or recovering it for himself.

That useful agricultural implement, the plough, has been instrumental on several occasions in bringing to light treasures which, but for its timely intervention, might have been for ever lost to the numismatist; and one of the instances in which it played an important, if indirect, part was in the discovery which was made in 1867 at Chancton Farm, near Steyning, in Sussex. In 1865, an old barn belonging to the farm, which was inclosed by a hedge and surrounded by some trees, was removed; the trees were cut down, the hedge grubbed up, and the ground ploughed over, leaving only one small bush, which at the time it was not considered necessary to remove. But in 1867, two years after the clearance was made, a labourer who with others was ploughing over the same ground (thinking the space occupied by the bush would be more useful for growing corn) proceeded to root it up, in order to let the plough pass. In doing this he brought to light immediately beneath the root of the bush a crock full of silver coins, for which a scramble at once took place among his fellow-labourers and

himself, the vessel being broken to atoms in the scrimmage. Many of the coins were carried off, but a large number of them were secured for the Crown, and many rare and curious specimens were added to the National Collection. The total number of coins could not have been less than two thousand, but before they could be collected many are supposed to have been sold, while others were concealed by the villagers in the hope of obtaining a good price for them at some future time.

The bulk of the coins were silver pennies of the reign of Edward the Confessor, and were in a wonderful state of preservation, some of them being as fresh as though just issued from the Mint.

The law as it exists in this country in connection with discoveries such as have been described has no doubt led to the concealment of many other remarkable finds, and the destruction of many interesting relics of antiquity; and this state of things will no doubt continue until some alteration takes place, and some encouragement is given to the finders to surrender their treasure on other conditions than those at present in force. It is fortunately seldom that this law is called into operation, for, whenever it is, it never fails to give rise to much dissatisfaction.



OBVERSE AND REVERSE OF COIN OF EDWARD THE CONFESSOR, FROM FIND AT CHANCTON FARM.