

Antiquities found in the Turbaries.

A Young Turf-bearer's find in the Turbaries.

BY MR. W. STRADLING.

MANY years are now passed, since a young friend of mine, by the name of Murch, entered his father's turbary,* with the determination of giving his assistance to the laborers, as turf-bearer,—a most arduous undertaking for one so young, and which I will endeavour to describe, as the process of preparing the peat, for fuel, is curious. A pit, ten feet square, is commenced by the delver, with the turf scythe, with which he removes the top spine, as useless; he then proceeds to cut his brocks, which he does with the greatest accuracy: places them round the mouth of the pit, when the bearer, with the turf fork, lifts them into a barrow, and wheels them to the drying-place, where, with a scythe, he splits each brock into three. They then remain on the ground, until sufficiently dry to be placed into ruckles, or, the smallest kind of drying heaps. Those,

* Near Edington Burtle.

in time, are formed into open worked tunegars, as they are termed; and lastly, they are ricked, in order to be carted to the different markets. A curious phenomenon, sometimes, occurs in the turbaries. The delver, at the depth of eight, nine, and sometimes even ten feet, and when within a foot or two of the clay, on which the peat rests, is suddenly lifted to the mouth of the pit, and steps off without difficulty or danger. A very old and experienced workman informed me "he had had several wind and water rides in his time, and that when wind caused the platform to rise, it went steadily up, and at the top he only had to pass his scythe through the mass, when the wind passed off, with a sound much like the drone of the bagpipe, and he gradually descended to the bottom, and resumed his work. When water was the cause, the ascent was more rapid, attended by a violent rocking motion, and the pit became useless."

Our young bearer felt much fatigued at the completion of what was his first and last day's work of that description; he was, however, well repaid; for whilst speaking to the delver, he espied in one corner at the bottom of the pit, what he imagined to be a log of black wood, and ordered it to be carefully removed. To his great delight, it proved to be a small square box, scooped in rather an oval shape within, and containing what I consider to be the most curious collection of British antiquities ever discovered in the turbaries of Somerset. The cist was unfortunately made of maple, and soon fell to dust; had it been of oak, or yew, it would have remained an interesting relic for ages yet to come. I will now endeavour to describe its contents:

A knife unfinished, as it came from the mould, with the rough edge on. Fig. 1:

One which had been much used:

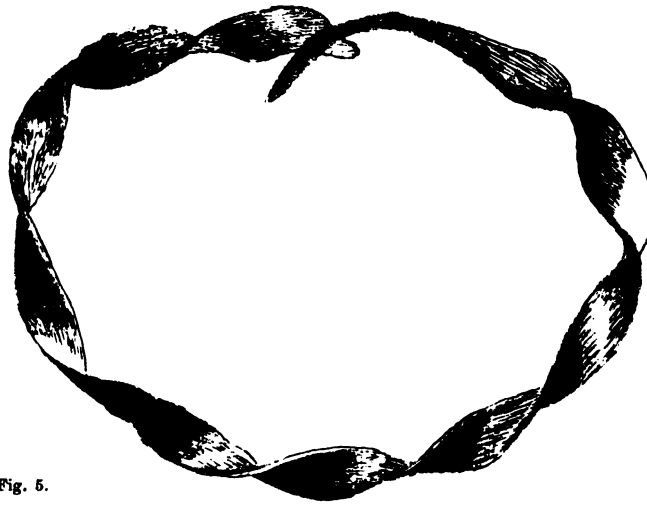


Fig. 5.

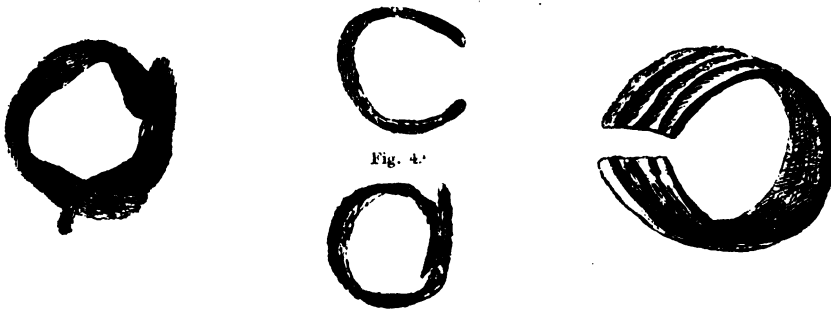
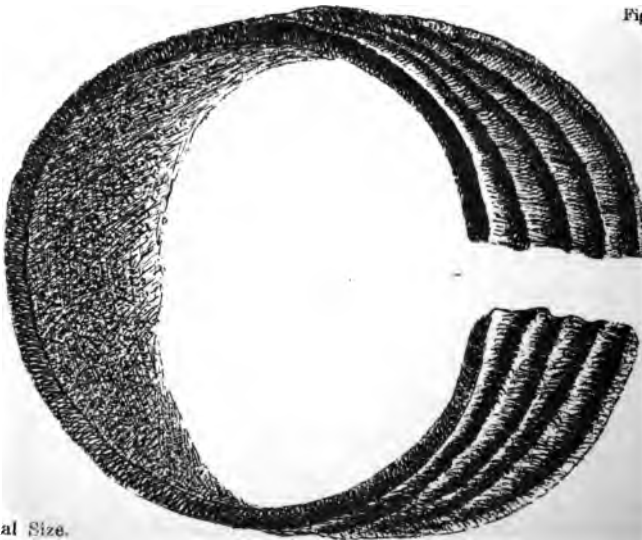


Fig. 4.

Fig. 3.



Original Size.

Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.

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A most beautiful specimen of nearly the same pattern. Fig. 2 :

Another not so perfect :

An armlet, with a ring for the finger to match.

Fig. 3 :

Two rings for the first or second joint of a lady's finger. Fig. 4 :

An armlet, of a curious twisted pattern, with a finger ring to match. Fig. 5 :

A torque, evidently, from its lightness, intended for the neck of a female. Fig. 6 :

Part of a ring, much rubbed, and probably broken in order to ascertain of what metal the whole collection was made; which is of British brass.

Four palstaves, or celts, without sockets; three having loops for thongs, the other without; all of different patterns.

I now come to what I consider to be the most interesting of the whole collection—Fig. 7; it is of the same pattern as the Jogh-Draoch, or chain-ring of divination, discovered in Ireland, and which, Meyrick says, was worn on the third finger of the left hand, by the Arch-druid:—the finger still held the most sacred, and on which is placed the wedding-ring.

With all due deference to my Archæological friends, I will now risk my opinion as to those precious and truly interesting antiques. We know that from the number of oaks, yews, and other kinds of trees, which from time to time have been discovered in our once British lake, that forests were on its borders; in them, perhaps, the horrid rites of Druidism were performed. Might not, then, a British priestess, at a very early date, have lost this *then* most valuable cist from her canoe. The knives are

precisely of the same pattern as those of gold found in Ireland, and which were supposed to have been used for sacrificing the victims in those barbarous days. The torque, armlets, and rings, convince us that she was one of high rank, and the Jogh-Draoch, I conceive, gave the possessor the order of priesthood.

Some of my Archæological friends will exclaim—If this be your theory, how do you account for a priestess having in her possession the four palstaves? My reply would be, might they not have been trophies, taken from the victims she had sacrificed? Others, I am aware, do not believe that any human sacrifices were ever made in Britain; but if we give up this chief, though inhuman rite, then farewell to Druidism, which from henceforth must be considered altogether fabulous.
