

Roman Coins lately found at Taunton.

BY JAMES HURLY PRING, M.D.

IN the various historical notices which have been given of the town of Taunton, it is always spoken of as having been "a place of great note in the time of the Saxons." It is only quite recently, however, that striking evidences have been adduced of its having been occupied, previous to "the time of the Saxons," by the Britons and the Romans. Of the Roman period, the memorials still left us are numerous and varied, and it is with the object of adding somewhat to these, and of affording further evidence of the presence of the Romans on the site of Taunton, that I am induced now to give an account of a few additional Roman coins which have lately been discovered here. Before proceeding, however, with a more particular notice of these coins, I think it well to observe that it must always be borne in mind that the Roman coins so generally diffused throughout Britain do actually represent to us the ancient currency in use during that long period when this country formed part of the Roman world. And if, as has been remarked, "coinage is the barometer of national civilisation," what a strong and significant light is thrown on the relative civilisation of the two nationalities, when we compare the exquisite workmanship of some of the coins commonly circulating amongst the Romans of Britain, with that exhibited in the rude and uncouth coinage of their barbarian conquerors, the Saxons! As regards, also, the actual amount of coin in circulation, it has been stated that there were clearly greater quantities of current coin during the flourishing state of Britain under the sway of the Romans, than for a thousand years after their departure.

On a former occasion it was pointed out that an abundant

supply of coins is usually yielded by those sites where interments have taken place,¹—an observation which was shown to be verified in the case of Holway, in the parish of Taunton St. Mary Magdalene. In addition to the interments with the urn of Roman silver coins ploughed up in 1821, which have been already described, about ten years ago a number of similar silver coins, with charred bones and ashes, indicating, apparently, a case of cremation, were accidentally discovered deposited together in a field, which was situated at a considerable distance from that in which the skeletons were found, and numerous isolated scattered coins have also from time to time been turned up at Holway. Some of these latter, found within the last two or three years, possess a special interest, inasmuch as they tend to afford evidence of the presence of the Romans on the site of Taunton upwards of a century and a half earlier than has hitherto been supposed. With the exception of the highly interesting coin of Vespasian, bearing the *Judæa Capta* on the reverse, found in the parish of Taunton St. James about a century ago, no other coin of this early period has until quite lately been discovered here. On the last occasion, however, when treating of this subject, I was enabled to state that I had recently become possessed of a second brass Antoninus Pius, just found at Holway, and I may now mention that since this a Domitian and a Trajan have also been found on this site. We have thus presented to us an almost continuous series of coins, ranging from the reign of Vespasian, A.D. 69, to that of Antoninus Pius, A.D. 161; a feature altogether new in this locality, and suggesting the presence of the Romans here at a date 176 years earlier than is indicated by the Roman silver coins of the Lower Empire found at Holway. These latter do not commence before the reign of Constans, A.D. 337, though they extend from that date in great numbers down to the time of Honorius, covering

(1). *The Briton and the Roman on the site of Taunton*, by James Hurly Pring, M.D., Taunton, 1880, p. 106.

continuously a second period of just 60 years. It has been remarked of coins generally that they are "the lenses of the historical telescope, which annihilate the distance of time, and bring distinctly before our eyes contemporary records of past ages with unerring accuracy." In describing these coins, then, it is my intention not merely to confine myself to a bare enumeration of them, but to offer also a few words of special comment in connection with some of them, with the object of infusing a greater degree of interest, and, so to speak, of life, into the annals of this, the Romano-British period of our history. Passing over the coin of *Vespasian*, A.D. 70, already frequently described, I shall here proceed to notice those coins which have been recently found, and all of which are now in my possession.

I.—*DOMITIAN*. Copper, A.D. 81–96. Found at Holway, in a field called *the Ten Acres*, in which the interments took place, and which adjoins the branch road which has been described as running from Norton to Neroche. In excellent preservation.

Obverse: Head to the right laureated, beardless.

Legend: IMP. CAES. DOMIT. AVG. GERM.
COS. XIII. CENS. PERP. P.P.

Reverse: Pallas marching to the right (S.C.), with spear in right hand, and parazonium in the left. VIRTUTI AVGVSTI. The *parazonium* here observed in the left hand was a bâton of command or a martial bâton, and not a pointless dagger, as is sometimes described.

Domitian was the son of *Vespasian*, and was the last of the twelve Cæsars. It was in his reign that Britain was discovered to be an island, and that its reduction was finally accomplished by *Julius Agricola*. The Emperor *Domitian* distinguished himself at first by his love of learning, and passed some beneficent laws, but afterwards gave way to many debasing excesses,

and perished by the hand of an assassin, A.D. 96. After death, his body was refused the honour of a funeral.

II.—TRAJAN. A.D. 98–117. *Ten Acres*, Holway, 1878. A bold and handsome coin, in fair preservation, apparently of orichalcum, or yellow brass.

Obverse: Laureated head to the right, beardless.

Legend: somewhat obliterated — OP(TIMO) AVG(VSTO) GER(MANICO) DAC(ICO).

Reverse: A noble figure of the goddess *Fortuna*, sitting in a chair, one foot on a small *scabellum*, or stool; the cornucopia in one hand, and the tiller of the rudder of a ship in the other. SENATVS POPVLVS QUE ROMANVS. On the exergue, FORT. RED. (*Fortunæ Reduci*).

Trajan was born at Italica (now Seville), A.D. 54, and reigned 19 years and a half. There are three fine arches existing to his honour, viz., that at Merida in Spain, and two others, one at Beneventum, the other at Ancona in Italy. The famous Doric column, erected in honour of his Dacian victories, still forms one of the majestic ornaments of modern Rome. After his death, his ashes were carried to Rome, and deposited under this stately column.

III.—ANTONINUS PIUS. A.D. 138–161. Holway, second brass; much defaced.

Obverse: Head of the Emperor to the right, laureated, slightly bearded. Legend, imperfect . . .

Reverse: A female figure of Britannia seated, holding a spear, but much obliterated.

Antoninus, surnamed Pius, forms a pleasing contrast to many of the Roman emperors, “those savages on thrones,” as some of them have been justly styled. He is stated to have possessed all the virtues that can form a perfect statesman, philosopher, and king. He extended the boundaries of the Roman province in Britain, and has left his mark on this

country, by the immense continuous rampart of earth and turf raised during his reign, between the firths of Clyde and Forth, which still bears the name of *the wall of Antoninus*. After a reign of 23 years, he died, A.D. 161.

IV.—CONSTANTINUS MAGNUS. Third brass, A.D. 306–337.

Found at Holway, 1881, in clearing out a wide ditch—probably an old sunken road, as the bottom of it is for the most part paved.

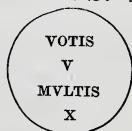
Obverse: Much patinated and defaced. Head of the Emperor to the right, galeated.

Reverse: Two winged Victories standing, but corroded and indistinct. The exergue being obliterated, there is no means of learning whether this coin was struck at Constantinople or not. It is interesting, however, as being the only coin of the kind hitherto found here, and also as being of an earlier date than any of the others of the Lower Empire previously discovered at Holway.

V.—JULIANUS (Julian the Apostate), A.D. 361–363. Silver coin, very perfect, found at Holway.

Obverse: Head to the right, diademed, with paludamentum and cuirass. D.N. IVLIANVS. P.F. AVG.

Reverse: Within a civic wreath—



Meaning that the public games and rejoicings were solemnly vowed by the people to be celebrated to his honour both in the fifth and tenth year of his reign, if it lasted so long a time. The *quinquennialia* were celebrated by him at Vienna, but he lost his life in a skirmish with the Persians before the arrival of the *decennialia*. The exergue bears the mint mark, *Con*; showing that this coin was struck at Constantinople, the native city of this Emperor.

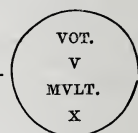
Although Julian drew odium on himself by professing Arianism at one time, and by ultimately renouncing Christianity altogether, we have it on the authority of a contemporary historian that he was to be classed with heroic characters, and was conspicuous for the brilliancy of his exploits and his innate majesty. This coin derives value from the fact that the portrait it presents to us confirms at the present day the fidelity of the description of the personal appearance of the Emperor which was given by Ammianus Marcellinus fifteen hundred years ago. Paris, the ancient Lutetia, was founded by the Emperor Julian, who was accustomed to repair to it as his favourite winter resort.

VI.—VALENS (2). A.D. 364–378. Two silver coins in high preservation, found at Holway.

(1) Found some years ago.

Obverse: Head of the Emperor to the right, filleted and diademed, with paludamentum and cuirass. DN. VALENS. P.F. AVG.

Reverse: Within a civic wreath—



On the exergue, A.B., the meaning of which seems questionable.

VII.—(2). Found in making a hedge at Holway, March, 1881. In excellent preservation.

Obverse: Head to the right, filleted, with diadem, paludamentum, and cuirass. DN. VALENS. P.F. AVG.

Reverse: Figure of Rome seated, with Victory standing on a globe in her right hand, and a spear in her left. VRBS ROMÆ. In the exergue, T.R.P.S.—TREVERIS PECVNIA SIGNATA,—struck at Treves, in Germany.

VIII.—GRATIANUS. A.D. 367. Silver coin, in perfect condition, found at Holway.

Obverse: Head to the right, diademed, and paludamentum and cuirass. D.N. GRATIANVS. P.F. AVG.

Reverse: Rome seated, with globe in right hand and spear in left. VIRTVS ROMANORVM. Exergue, T.R.P.S.

The globe, as here held in the right hand, is said to have been introduced by Augustus to express possession of the world. In many cases, as in the preceding, the globe itself is surmounted by a small figure of Victory, the additional signification of which is sufficiently apparent.

The famous poet, Ausonius, was the tutor of the Emperor Gratian.

IX.—VALENTINIANUS JUNIOR. A.D. 375. Silver, found in a hedge at Holway, 1875, in good preservation.

Obverse: Head to the right, diademed. Paludamentum and cuirass. D.N. VALENTINIANVS IVN. P.F.

Reverse: Winged figure of Victory walking to the left, holding wreath in right hand and palm branch in the left. VICTORIA AVG. G.G.

Exergue, T.R.P.S.

X.—THEODOSIUS. A.D. 379. Silver coin. Holway.

Obverse: Head to the right, diademed; paludamentum and cuirass. D.N. THEODOSIVS. P.F. AVG.

Reverse: Rome seated, holding a spear in the right hand, and a cornucopia in the left. CONCORDIA. AVG. G.G. Exergue, A.Q.P.S. The mint mark of Aquilegia.

He was the last of the Emperors who was sole master of the whole Roman Empire, and being a zealous supporter of Christianity, he abolished the heathen worship in Rome. His reign was tarnished, however, by his vindictive and indiscriminate slaughter of the inhabitants of Thessalonica, for

which he was excommunicated by St. Ambrose, and made to do open penance.

XI.—EUGENIUS. A.D. 392. Silver; worn. Holway.

Obverse: D.N. EVGENIVS. P.F. AVG.

Reverse: Figure seated, holding a Victory in right hand and a spear in the left. VIRTVS ROMANORVM. Exergue, T.R.P.S.

This usurper enjoyed but a short reign of two years. His title was acknowledged in the western provinces; but he was vanquished and put to death at Aquileia, by order of Theodosius.

XII.—ARCADIUS. A.D. 395. Silver. Holway.

Obverse: Head to the right, diademed; paludamentum and cuirass. D.N. ARCADIVS P.F. AVG.

Reverse: Figure seated, holding a globe, surmounted by a figure of Victory in the right hand, and a spear in the left. VIRTVS ROMANORVM. Exergue, T.R.P.S.

He succeeded his father Theodosius, and was succeeded by his brother Honorius, the last of the Roman Emperors who held sway in Britain. In the reign of Arcadius, Pelagius, a Romanized Briton, spread the noted Pelagian heresy, reprobated, even at the present day, in the Ninth Article of our Church.

In addition to those which have now been described, great numbers of these late Roman silver coins, discovered at Holway, have passed into private hands, and many are to be seen at present in our Museum. It has, I am aware, become the fashion of late to disparage the value of the evidence furnished by the presence of Roman coins, a proceeding which may perhaps be held to be admissible in those instances in which such coins are found dissociated from any other remains. The site of Taunton, however, in addition to its Roman coins,

presents, as has been shown, numerous other interesting and substantial relics and proofs of Roman occupation, far exceeding those which have been found in many other conspicuously Roman towns, which, like Rochester, for example, bear the stamp of their Roman origin even in their name.

In the present instance, therefore, these coins serve not only to attest the presence of the Romans in Taunton: they supply also chronological data, whereby to fix the period during which they were present on this site—information which it would be difficult to derive from any other source.

In conclusion, I would here take occasion to advert to what has been pointed out as “a peculiarity in the Roman coinage, that two pieces of money are seldom, if ever, found to be alike. Either the heads of many are alike, but the inscriptions vary, even if the letters are the same: or, the whole fronts of two or more are the same, but the reverses are different: or, the figures of the reverses are the same, but the inscriptions vary,” &c. Though this observation may seem to require some modification, there can be no doubt that it is to a great extent substantially correct. Of 242 Roman coins found on Leigh Down, near Bristol, which were examined by Mr. Seyer, he states (*Memoirs of Bristol*, vol. i. p. 174) that “of the whole of this number, there were only two which were not instantly discernible to be of different moulds.”

Thus, then, each of the coins above described, apart from any historical interest it may possess, has some feature peculiarly its own, which takes it out of the common category of mere ordinary coins, and invests it with an individual interest,—an interest which it is hoped will be held to lend additional sanction to the brief description which has now, for the first time, been bestowed on some of these Roman coins found at Taunton.
