TREASURE TROVE IN THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND.

By G. M. Fraser,

Librarian of the Public Library, Aberdeen.

THE comparatively few finds of Roman coins in the north of Scotland are just another illustration of how the science of numismatics is the handmaid of history. There are isolated examples of these discoveries north of Aberdeenshire, but they are comparatively few, and such as might have occurred if the Roman arms had never penetrated further north than what are now known as the Grampians, but which in the early centuries bore the humbler name of the "Munth," or Mount. There are the instances of a coin of Titus being dug up at Forres, in 1843, and on another occasion a coin of Claudius Gothicus, A.D. 268–270, found at Cullen, which is also on the Moray Firth. In 1860, a Greek coin of Nero, struck at Corinth, was found at Burghead in the same neighbourhood, and a few years since, a coin of Marcus Aurelius at Mortlach, Banffshire, also a copper coin of Antoninus Pius, A.D. 138; and about the same time a gold coin of Vespasian was found at Inverurie, fifteen miles north of Aberdeen. But the largest find of Roman coins in this region was on the banks of the Dee, about ten miles west of the city of Aberdeen. About eight miles from the city is the well-marked site of a military camp, known locally as Norman Dykes, but its character as a Roman fort is attested by certain features in its construction. It was in the immediate neighbourhood of this, that many years ago a number of silver coins were found in a moss. Their precise denominations do not appear to have been ascertained beyond the fact that they were coins of the empire, and the supposition is that, for some reason or other,

they had been buried in the neighbourhood of the camp when Agricola was on his return march from the north.

Not far from where these Roman coins were found, several billon pieces of Francis and Mary were recovered in 1841. A number of other archæological discoveries have been made in the district, which is notable as having been the seat of a community of the Knights Templars, and their successors, the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem.

Six years later, quite a large discovery of coins of this character was made in the city of Aberdeen itself. In digging for the foundation of extended business premises near Marischal College, workmen came upon three bags, two of leather and the third of a canvas material, buried about three feet below the surface. The bags proved to contain a hoard of several thousands of billon coins, namely, lions or hardheads of Mary and Francis, of date 1558, but most of them were in a poor state of preservation. How they came to be buried there cannot be stated with certainty, but it is very probable that they were placed where they were found as a temporary expedient by one of the monastic houses of the city. Marischal College was founded partly on the site of the Grey Friars Monastery, and in 1559, when it became very clear that—for a time, at all events—all ecclesiastical property in the city was to be seized, perhaps destroyed, by the Reformers, the community of the Grey Friars voluntarily resigned their whole property, temporarily as they hoped, into the hands of the Town Council. By discoveries of bones at the spot where the find of the Mary and Francis lions occurred, it has been ascertained that this was the burial ground of the Order, and there can be little doubt that the Friars, who had come into possession of this considerable mintage of the previous year, buried it in the graveyard against the dawning of a happier day for their Church.

Many other minor discoveries of coins have been made in Aberdeen during the past century. In 1807, when Union Street, the principal street of the city, had just been formed, and a number of old buildings were being cleared away to form St Nicholas Street, now the principal business thoroughfare from Union Street to the north, workmen came upon a wooden vessel, about ten feet underground, containing a large quantity of silver coins. While they were yet available, a

number of the coins were identified as of the mintages of Edward I. of England and Alexander III. of Scotland, but it may be doubted whether the identification was particularly technical. As no one in authority took any special interest in the find, the coins were very quickly scattered among the workmen and others, so that no part of this trove appears to have been preserved. A week later, on almost the same spot, workmen discovered an earthen jar containing about eighteen hundred silver coins, also of Edward I. and Alexander III., and, fortunately, possession of these was taken by the authorities, and they were lodged in the Town House. With regard to these discoveries the supposition has always been that the coins formed part of the treasure of the army of Edward III., whose troops operated in Aberdeen and neighbourhood from about 1330 onwards, and in 1336 completely burned down the town.

A find of an almost similar character was made in 1827, at Footdee, on the eastern extremity of the city of Aberdeen, near the Ferry, which was one of the two points of crossing the Dee to and from Aberdeen until the sixteenth century. Some workmen were digging a sewer, when they unearthed a considerable bulk of gold and silver coins. A contemporary description tells that "the greater part of them were silver, larger than a shilling," and such as were examined at all critically were set down as coins of the earliest Edwards. The coins were deposited under some stones which had evidently been carefully placed over the treasure for security.

It would be curious if no discovery of coins had been made in the neighbourhood of Exchequer Row, Aberdeen, the small street, still known by this name, where the Aberdeen Mint stood throughout its history. As a matter of fact no find of coins actually struck at Aberdeen has ever been made there, although coins of the Aberdeen mint are not uncommon, chiefly groats, and half-groats of the Davids, and, fortunately, they may be examined in the British Museum, as well as in local collections. But in the adjoining small and old street that runs from the Exchequer Row to the harbour, named the Shiprow—*i.e.*, the Ship Rue—whilst some repairs were being made to an old house, dating from the Reformation, quite a quantity of coins and

trinkets was discovered. Most of the coins were copper twopenny pieces, or turners, of Charles I., and in all probability they had lain hid in this old house—which was once the residence of the Provost of Aberdeen—from about the date of their mintage.

The most important treasure trove of Aberdeen—indeed, the largest find of coins that has ever been made in Scotland—was the discovery of the locally-celebrated "Bronze Pot." On the 31st of May, 1886, workmen were busy excavating some foundation works in the Upperkirkgate, one of the old boundary streets of Aberdeen, when the foreman drove his pick into some hard substance, that gave out a sharp metallic ring, and examination brought to light a bronze pot, from which, through the hole that the workman's pick had made, a small stream of silver coins began to make its way. The pot proved to contain considerably over 12,000 silver pennies, or sterlings. The amount of the find had only once before been approached, in Scotland, namely, by the Montraive treasure trove, in Fifeshire, which contained 9,615 coins, consisting of groats, half-groats, and pennies.

The treasure was, as usual, and, indeed, with great probability, set down as part of the pay chest of one of the English armies that swept over the North of Scotland about the middle of the fourteenth century. The magnitude of the treasure quickly brought on the scene the officials of the Exchequer, and the pot and as many of the coins as could be taken possession of, or recovered by offers of reward, were deposited for examination in the Exchequer Offices, Edinburgh. Altogether complete coins to the number of 12,247 were recovered, and fragments of about 20 others, making in all 12,267. The names of the mints—and for details relative to these, as also regarding the distribution of the coins, I am indebted to the courtesy of Sir Kenneth Mackenzie, the King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, Edinburgh—of the 12,267 coins are as follows :—

ENGLISH.

Edwards I., II., and III. :—

	Number of coins.
Berwick	220
Bristol	275

ENGLISH.

	Number of coins.
Bury St. Edmund's	408
Canterbury	3,179
Chester...	21
Durham	1,115
Exeter	15
Kingston (Hull)	16
Lincoln	106
London	5,883
Newcastle	153
York	272
Robert de Hadeleie, Moneyer	20
Dublin (3 without triangle)	59
Waterford (2 without triangle)	21
Aquitaine—Edward III. deniers	4

SCOTTISH.

Alexander III.	113
Robert Bruce	8
John Baliol, 3 of St. Andrews and 7 "Rex Scotorum"	11

FOREIGN STERLINGS.

Robert III. de Bethune, Count of Flanders, struck at Alost, 1305–1322	12
Robert III. de Bethune, Count of Flanders, struck at "Gandes" (Ghent)	1
Arnold, Count of Loos, 1280–1323	3
Ferri IV. of Lorraine, 1312–1328	2
Edward, Count of Bar	3
John, Count of Luxemburg, as King of Bohemia and Poland, 1311–1346 ...	7
Gaucher II. de Chatillion, 1314–1328, struck at Yoe	55
John d'Avesnes, Count of Hainault and Holland, 1280–1304, struck at Mons ...	7
Gauleran II. de Luxemburg, Lord of Ligny, 1304–1353	8
Louis IV., Count of Flanders, 1314–1347, struck at Aix la Chapelle "Moneta Aquensis"	5

FOREIGN STERLINGS.

	Number of coins.
Gui de Dampierre, Marquis of Namur, Count of Flanders, 1280–1305	3
William of Avesnes, Bishop of Cambray, 1292–1295	1
John III., Duke of Brabant, 1312–1355 ...	6
Not deciphered and some illegible	27
Corroded and almost illegible, but appearing to be of London and Canterbury	208
Fragments of about	20
Total ...	12,267

Of the 12,267 coins recovered, 12,193 were obtained from the finders, and 74 were recovered from individuals. A number of the coins, 62 in all, were purchased by Her late Majesty, Queen Victoria, viz. :—10 of Berwick, 12 of Bristol, 4 of Chester, 12 of Durham, 3 of Exeter, 4 of Waterford, 1 of Aquitaine, 12 of Alexander III., 2 of Robert Bruce, and 2 of John Baliol. 405 of the coins, including specimens of all the mints, were handed over to the National Collection of Antiquities, Edinburgh, leaving 11,800 coins for further disposal, as also the bronze pot, of which an illustration is here given.

Naturally, there was a strong wish in Aberdeen to retain for the city the remarkable vessel in which the treasure had been found, and specimens of the various types and mintages in the collection. Application to this effect was made to the Exchequer in Edinburgh by the Lord Provost of the city, and the application was met by the Exchequer officials in an admirable spirit. It was arranged that after deducting the coins purchased by Her late Majesty, those preserved for the National Collection in Edinburgh, and a few which had been returned to local collectors who had purchased them, the Town Council of Aberdeen and the University Authorities should be at liberty to select from the remaining hoard of 11,800 coins, specimens of any or all the types, the price to be at the same nominal rate as the valuation put upon the coins for the purposes of the reward by the Crown Authorities. This arrangement was duly carried out, and the Town Council and the

University, acting conjointly through an expert in Edinburgh, selected 129 coins, including all the mints, and to the great satisfaction of the townspeople the famous "Bronze Pot," and the 129 selected coins were duly returned for preservation in Aberdeen on the 7th of January, 1888.

This was not quite the end of the story. For once, the Exchequer was more liberal than was expected. The total outlay of the Crown Authorities in connection with the matter amounted to £3 reward to the finder of the pot, £136 17*s.* 6*d.* reward on recovery of coins, and £15 19*s.* 3*d.* legal expenses, in all £155 16*s.* 9*d.* It was arranged that on recouping the Exchequer for the reward money, £139 odd, Aberdeen should have not merely the bronze pot and the 129 selected coins, but the whole residue of the treasure trove, after supplying certain local collections throughout the country. This arrangement was carried out in 1891, and on the 30th of May of that year the Lord Provost of Aberdeen received a parcel containing 10,742 complete coins, and fragments of 20 others, 10,762 in all, for preservation and distribution.

The "Bronze Pot"—a most familiar name to the citizens of Aberdeen—is preserved in the Aberdeen Sculpture Gallery and Museum. It may be expected, in due time, to become a sort of palladium of the city. It is of bronze, of a type which still survives to us in the so-called gipsy kettle, and stands 18 inches high, by about 8 inches wide at the neck. When the treasure was buried, a stone had been placed in the mouth of the pot for a lid. One of those who took a great interest in this discovery, was the late Dr. Alexander Walker of Aberdeen, who gifted to the Aberdeen Public Library—of which he was for many years an honoured Member of Committee—the very "life-like" painting of the pot by Mr. W. Smith, junr., of 19, Cathcart Studios, Redcliffe Road, Kensington, with which this paper is illustrated.