


A FIND OF ENGLISH HALF-GROATS OF HENRY
VII. IN THE COUNTY OF WICKLOW.

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VEN before the celebrated case of the "Gold Ornaments," the Law of Treasure Trove was most unpopular in Ireland, and the difficulty of obtaining particulars of the discovery of specie is always great.

In 1897, an interesting discovery was made in County Wicklow about half way between the town of that name and Arklow. A ploughman working in a field which had not been broken within the memory of any person living in the neighbourhood, found a number of coins under a stone, which was quite close to the surface ; and these are all the particulars regarding the hiding place that it was possible to obtain.

Some twenty of the pieces were sent to the writer for the purpose of examination, and proved to be half-groats of Henry VII.'s second issue, struck at London, and bearing the mint-mark lys.

All the coins were considerably clipped, in fact most of the legends on both sides had been removed. Otherwise they were in very good condition, showing no trace of having been in circulation, in fact they looked as if they had been struck from new dies, as the bust and the letters remaining were sharp. All were of a uniform black colour.

Being anxious to inspect the remaining portion of the find, only about half of which had come under observation, some efforts were made to interview the owner, which, however, led to no result.

Having regard to the fact that all the pieces found belonged to the same reign, and all were of the same denomination, there is no reason

to suppose that the hoard contained anything but half-groats. It is possible, in view of the fact that they were in such good condition, that the possessor may have come direct from England with the money, landing on the coast close by with the intention of going to Dunganstown, some ten miles inland, where there was an English settlement. On the way, perhaps, he hid the coins in the first convenient place, and death may have prevented his recovering the treasure.

The uniform clipping suggests a possible reason for his wishing to hide the coins, namely, that no one would be likely to accept a quantity of money in such condition. The custom of clipping coins in Ireland, about the time that these half-groats were issued, became so serious that at last an Act was passed on the 15th of April, 1491, "to prohibit the paying or receiving any clipped or counterfeit money, and later on a law was made in England, forbidding it being imported thither from Ireland, above the value of three shillings and four pence."¹

Clipping coins appears to have been a trouble in Ireland so far back as 1447, for "in a parliament holden at Trymme," in that year, an Act was passed "against clipped money, money called O'Reyle's money, and other unlawful money."²

It is extremely probable that in those days the small ships, then in use, sailed up the Red Cross river, not far from the mouth of which the coins were found. To reach the river from England or Wales the passage could be made between the "Cadling" and "North Arklow" banks, which latter sandbank must have been well known, seeing that it is almost uncovered at low water.

From the time of Richard II. there was considerable fighting in this neighbourhood where the O'Tooles and O'Byrnes caused much trouble.

Cromwell demolished the castle of Arklow on his march to Wexford, and of it no trace now exists, but a little of Dunganstown castle still remains. There are, however, "several raths, and the remains of extensive fortifications."

¹ Simon, 1749 edition, page 132.

² *Trim Castle*, by R. Butler, page 26.