

PILGRIMS' SIGNS.

BY CECIL BRENT, F.S.A.

THE small *Signacula* which form the subject of the following paper are signs, or brooches of lead or pewter, mostly relating to St. Thomas à Becket, purchased by Pilgrims to shew that they had visited the shrine of the Martyr. These Signs were often sold at the Shrines by priests, who derived a large revenue from their sale.

At Dartford the Guild of All Saints in Overy Street, and the Guild of the Virgin in Spital Street, supplied Pilgrims to St. Thomas of Canterbury with such Signs. When Henry VIII ordered all pilgrimages to cease, and Becket to be declared a traitor, the altar of St. Thomas was removed from Dartford Church, and the townspeople's trade in Signs was totally ruined. I have been informed that, at Canterbury, and in one or two other places, furnaces for melting the lead used in casting the Signs are still in existence. Dean Stanley, in his Memorials of Canterbury, states that the Pilgrims who visited the shrine received the blood of the Martyr mixed with water, in a small leaden bottle, or ampulla, which became a regular mark of Canterbury Pilgrims.

A sign in my collection is said to have been one of these bottles. Its height is $1\frac{1}{4}$ -inch; its diameter is, at the mouth $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch; at the waist $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch; and at base $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch. Steps deeply worn away appear in the South aisle of the Trinity Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, and it has been suggested that here Pilgrims knelt, to receive the blood. Besides these leaden bottles, pilgrims usually procured more common reminiscences, on their way back to the Inn.

Mercery Lane, the narrow street which led from the Cathedral to the Chequers Inn, in all probability was so

named from its shops and stalls, where objects of ornament, or devotion, were clamorously offered for sale, to the hundreds who flocked by, eager to carry away some memorial of their visit to Canterbury.

Every Pilgrim who visited the Shrine was expected to purchase a sign of the Saint, to be worn by him in his hat, or fastened to his garment. Most of the Signs bore a pin at the back for the purpose.

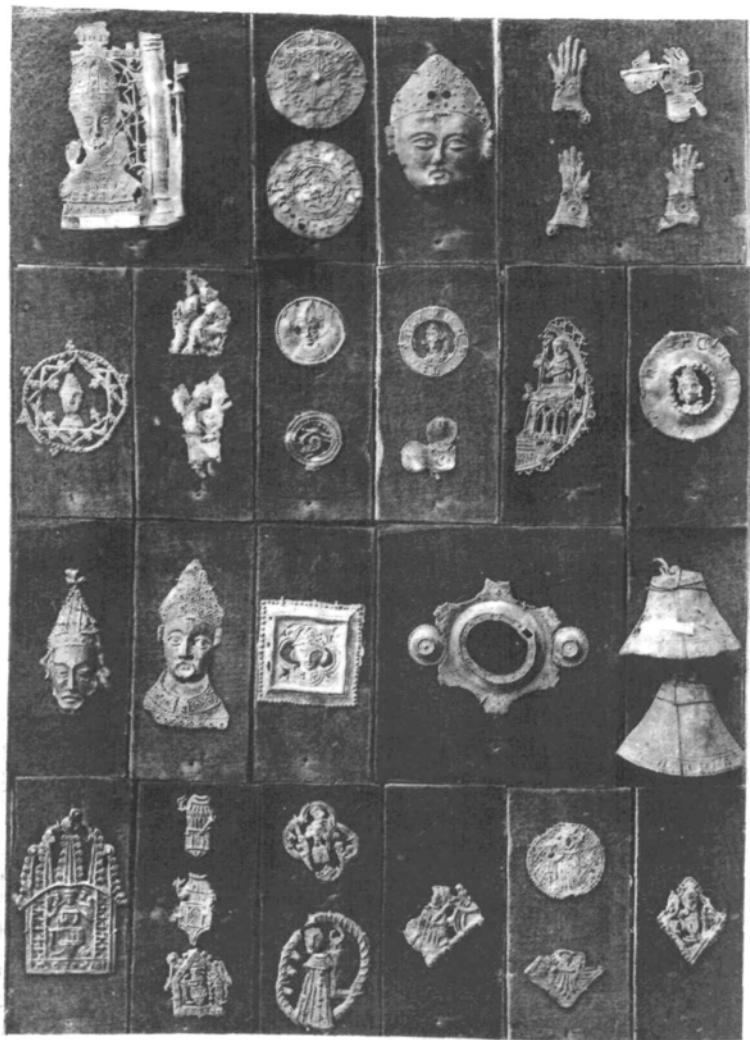
Erasmus, in his Colloquy of the Pilgrimage for religion's sake, makes Mendemus ask Ogygius, "But what strange dress is this? it is all over set off with shells scolloped, full of images of lead and tin, and chains of straw work, and the cuffs are adorned with snakes' eggs instead of bracelets." Ogygius answers, "I have visited St. James of Compostella,* and returning I visited the Virgin beyond the sea."

Giraldus Cambrensis in the twelfth century states that returning from the Continent, by way of Canterbury, he had on his arrival in London an interview with the Bishop of Winchester; the Bishop, seeing him and his companions with Signs of St. Thomas hung about their necks, remarked that he perceived they had just come from Canterbury.

In Urry's edition of the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, published soon after Chaucer's death, we are told what the Pilgrims did on their arrival in Canterbury.

"Knelid adown tofore the shrine and hertlich their bedis
 They preyd to Seint Thomas in such wyse as they couth;
 And sith the holy relikes ech man with his mowith
 Kissid as a goodly monk the names told and taught.
 And sith to othir places of holynes they raught
 And wer in their devocioune tyl service wer al doon:
 And sith they drowgh to dinerward as it drew to noon:
 Then as manere and custom is signes there they bought;
 For men of contre shuld know whome they had sought
 Eche man set his silver in such things as they liked:
 And in the meen while the miller had ypidid
 His bosom ful of signys of Caunterbury brochis;
 Though the Pardoner and he pryvily in hir pouchis
 They put them afterwards that noon of them it wist."

* Papal Bulls excommunicated those who dared to sell pilgrims' scallop shells except at Santiago. A pilgrimage to Compostella was as indispensable in the middle ages, as that to Mecca is for the Mohammedan. No fewer than 2460 licences for the pilgrimage were granted to Englishmen in the year 1434.



HARMAN, PHOTO., BROMLEY, KENT.

29 Mediæval Brooches and Pins worn by Pilgrims
after visiting Shrines at Canterbury.

2/5ths of actual size.

afterwards

“They set their signys upon their hedes and som upon their capp
And sith to the dyneruard they gan for to strapp.”

Pilgrims' Signs are also referred to in Piers Ploughman's Vision, when a Pilgrim is introduced, who

Bar by his side
an hundred of Ampulla
on his hat satin
Signs of Synia
and shells of Galicia.

Sir Walter Scott in *Quentin Durward*, describing Louis the Eleventh of France, says “his hat was ornamented with a paltry sign of the Virgin, in lead, such as the poorer sort of pilgrims bring from Loretto.”

Pilgrims' Signs are seldom found in any place except in the bed of large rivers; numbers of them are found in the Thames. One has been found in the Ouse at York, and preserved in the York Museum, and is a fine specimen of the Ampulla of St. Thomas à Becket. A Sign of St. Thomas has been found in the Stour at Canterbury and one at Lynn.

M. Forgeais, in his *Collection de Plombs Historiés*, figures a fine Ampulla of St. Thomas, which was found in the Seine in 1862.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PILGRIMS' SIGNS OR BROOCHES, SHOWN ON THE PLATE (*beginning at the left hand of the top row and proceeding from left to right along each row in succession*).

No. 1. Demi-figure of St. Thomas, mitred and richly jewelled, under a canopy, half of which only remains.

(*Dug up in the London Steelyard, 1864.*)

No. 2. Two circular signs of St. Thomas, an inch and a half in diameter. The field of one is occupied by a sexafoil. In the margin is this legend, *Sacte. Thoma O.R.P.me.* The other sign is inscribed, *S. Thom. O.R.P.me.* In its field is an octofoil, enclosing a cross composed of four fleurs de lys. These two signs are of foreign work of the fifteenth century, and are most likely from the shrine of St. Thomas at Sens.

No. 3. Head of St Thomas, part of a demi-figure; a perfect

specimen is figured in the *Collectanea Antiqua*, vol. ii., on which is inscribed "Thomas."

(*Found in the Thames, 1867.*)

No. 4. Gloves of St. Thomas. In a curious inventory, of the treasures formerly preserved at Canterbury, a list is given of the relics of Thomas à Becket; and we are therein told that in a great round ivory coffer were his gloves, adorned with three orphreys, *i.e.*, three bands of golden embroidery. Three of these signacular gloves have rich orphreys round the tops, jewels on their backs, and episcopal rings on the little finger. The fourth glove holds a purse.

No. 5. A Circular Sign, with twisted edge, outside of which are six sets of three pellets; within is the demi-figure of St. Thomas. The saint wears a triangular mitre with pearled edge. 14th century.

(*Found in the Thames at Queenhithe.*)

No. 6. Two fragments, of Signs of St. Thomas, on which are figured portions of the knights who slew him, viz:—William Tracy, Reginald de FitzUrse, Richard de Brito, and Hugh de Morville.

No. 7. Two Circular Signs. On the first is depicted the head and shoulders of the saint, mitre on head, and the letters T O on each side of the face. The second circular sign encloses the letter T.

No. 8. Two signs. The first is circular, with the bust of the saint; round the margin are the words, *Caput Thome*. The second is a sign in the shape of the four-leafed shamrock, with the letter T. in the centre.

No. 9. Fragment of a sign of the Martyrdom of St. Thomas, on which remains the figure of Edward Grim, Becket's Cross bearer. A similar figure of Grim appears in the painting discovered in St. John's Church, Winchester, in 1853.

No. 10. Circular sign, enclosing the head of Saint Thomas; inscribed round the border "*Caput Thome.*"

No. 11. Head of Saint Thomas with a triangular mitre.

No. 12. Head and bust of Saint Thomas, with mitre on head.

No. 13. Square sign of St. Thomas. Head inside a quatre-foil; jewelled mitre.

(*Found in the Thames, 1866.*)

No. 14. Fermail of the 14th century, inscribed "*St. Thomas.*"

(*Thames, 1867.*)

No. 15. Two Bells of St. Thomas, inscribed "*Campane Thome.*"

The other Pilgrims' Signs in the plate commemorate visits to Shrines of Sir John Schorne and St. Oswald.

SIR JOHN SCHORNE.

This Saint was in high repute for the cure of ague, many traditional stories long kept alive his memory, and amongst others that of his knees having become horny by his continued posture of devotion, and of his having upon some important emergency conjured the devil into a boot; a representation of this extraordinary scene was set up in the East window of North Marston Church, Bucks, and on the Well, as seen by Browne Willis, was written

Sir John Schorne
Gentleman borne
Conjured the Devil into a Boot.

Sir John Schorne seems to have had shrines at Shorne, one mile beyond Cobham Park, and at Marston, near Gravesend.

No. 16. Represents Sir John Schorne, as a priest, in gown and cope, standing in a polygonal pulpit, placed beneath a canopy of five pinnacles; on each side of the priest is a figure. On the bottom of the Sign appears to be inscribed, *M. A. jo. scorne.*

No. 17. The two first are fragments of Signs which represent Sir John Schorne in a pulpit; head lost; right hand raised, fore finger pointing upwards, the rest of the fingers closed, the left hand grasps the edge of the pulpit.

The third is a square triangular headed Sign in which is depicted a demi-figure of Sir John Schorne, in a pulpit, holding at the left side a boot containing the Devil, at the right side a vase with a tall flower.

No. 18. A demi-bust of the Saint, much defaced, in a quatre-foil frame.

The other is an oval-shaped Sign, containing, within a roped wreath, the figure of Sir John Schorne, with a rosary at the right side, and a boot with the head of the Devil peeping out.

The last four signs relate to St. Oswald, King of Northumbria, who reigned nine years and was killed by King Penda. He was first buried at Barching, in Lincolnshire, his body was removed to Gloucester in A.D. 909. To him is dedicated the Church of Paddlesworth, near Folkestone.