

# South African Numismatic Society

## Notes From Our Scrap Book

### SMALL CHANGE

#### SOUTH AFRICAN SUBSTITUTES—TOKENS AND COUPONS

(By SENIOR)

THE want of small change has been felt at various periods in most countries of the civilised world, and South Africa is no exception. Different devices have been adopted to fill the want, but the most general plan in the British Empire has been the issue of tokens. South Africa has, in contrast with the other Dominions and even with some of the smaller colonies and dependencies, produced few tokens. Little attention has hitherto been paid to them by the collection of Africana; but this field, though a very limited one, has fascinating possibilities. In the following notes the writer has something to say about the few tokens which he has seen or of which he has heard; but he feels convinced from what he has been told by old residents of the Union that there were others besides those he describes, and a search for unedited varieties would be a most interesting pastime for anyone who took up the matter as a hobby.

#### What Tokens Are

Before dealing in detail with the tokens which have appeared in South Africa, it will be appropriate and explanatory of what follows to give some definition of the term "token," and also a brief sketch of the principal British token coinages. In a broad sense, all coins which are not intrinsically of the value they represent are tokens, but the tokens now referred to are those which, among other definitions, have been described as "pieces of money current by sufferance and not coined by authority," and "discs representing coins issued by tradesmen and others as evidence of amounts due by the issuers to the holders." These definitions, while embracing the vast bulk of the countless tokens which have been issued within the Empire to meet the requirements of retail trade, are not all-comprehensive, as will appear later.

#### First Use in England

In England tokens first came into use in the reign of Henry VIII, owing to the want of authorised coins of lower values than a penny, and during the reign of Elizabeth large numbers stamped in lead, tin and even leather were issued by vintners, grocers and other tradesmen and extensively circulated. They were taken in payment for goods or exchanged for authorised money at the shops from which they emanated. In the reigns of James I and Charles I farthing and half-farthing tokens of a wretched description were issued under Royal concessions. They were so thin and small that they could with difficulty be handled by "horny-handed sons of toil," and they caused widespread disgust and dissatisfaction. The Commonwealth brought no remedy; in fact, the situation became worse, with the result that the English currency was deluged with private tokens. Nearly every tradesman of standing in nearly every town and

village in the Kingdom issued halfpence and farthings, and many municipalities did the same. During the 25 years preceding the year 1672, some 20,000 different varieties appeared in the United Kingdom, mostly in England.

### An Epoch-making Year

In that year—an epoch-making year in the annals of British currency—Charles II issued an ample supply of official halfpence and farthings of the finest copper, and at the same time stringently suppressed illegal coinages. Matters went on pretty smoothly for over a century, when, owing to Government neglect, the need of small change again became clamant, and once more the entire Kingdom was flooded with unauthorised copper money. In England, Scotland and Ireland these coins appeared everywhere. These eighteenth century tokens were very superior in design and execution to those issued in the Republican days, and any considerable collection of them must comprise many specimens of artistic beauty. Once more the illegality was firmly put down, and once more ample issues of regal coins took the place of these tokens. The great increase in the price of copper during the Napoleonic wars caused the intrinsic value of a penny to be more than that sum, with the result that vast quantities of copper coin were surreptitiously melted down, and the need of small change again became pressing. Another token period followed, but about 1820 the trouble was finally remedied, and since then the United Kingdom has had no need for any authorised coinages.

In the British Colonies it has however been different, and the issues of tokens have continued until more recent years. In Australia and New Zealand, for instance, during the fifties, sixties and seventies of the last century, owing to the scarcity of small change, municipalities and merchants, pawnbrokers and public-house keepers were issuing their own pence and half-pence in the form of tokens, which, though not official coin of the realm, were found exceedingly useful by the general public, and which could always be exchanged for silver coin. South Africa followed suit, but, as already indicated, only to a limited extent.

### South Africa's Earliest Tokens

The earliest known tokens of South Africa, however, appeared long before the middle of the last century, though the date of their issue, whether they were actually in circulation or not, the years during which they were in use, and the extent of their currency are problems which have not yet been solved. These coins are four in number, two of silver and two of copper. On the obverse of each is the figure of a flying dove with an olive branch in its mouth, and on the reverse are the numerals 10 and 11111 on the silver, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{1}{4}$  on the copper. These, presumably, represent the values for which the pieces were current, 10d., 5d.,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. and  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. respectively. In a half-circle above the numerals on each variety is the word "Griqua" and below them the word "Town."

In the "Annals of the Transvaal Museum," vol. 2, page 170, there is an article by Dr. W. J. B. Gunning, in which he gives the results of inquiries he made into the origin and use of these tokens. Dr. Gunning states that in 1892 he came across three specimens of them in the Free State, the  $\frac{1}{4}$ d., the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. and the 5d. pieces. They are now in the museum at Pretoria. The first mention of these coins found by Dr. Gunning was by the Rev. John Campbell, who in 1812 visited South Africa for the London Missionary Society. Referring to the progress of the Grikwas in civilisation, he wrote:

"It was likewise resolved that as they (the Griquas) had no circulating medium amongst them, by which they could purchase any small articles, such as knives, scissors, cloths, etc., supposing a shop to be established amongst them, which they were anxious that there should be, they should apply to the Missionary Society to get silver coins of different value coined for them in England, which the missionaries would take for their allowance from the society, having "Griqua Town" marked on them. It is probable that, if these were adopted, in a short time they would circulate among all the nations round about, and be a great convenience.

#### **Little Light on the Matter**

As to whether the proposal referred to by Mr. Campbell was carried out or not, the London Missionary Society could throw little light on the matter. In answer to an inquiry addressed to him, the Rev. R. Wardlaw Thompson wrote: "Some years ago I heard of tokens which were struck by the society when the Griqualand State was still in Griqualand West. I believe these tokens were used in great numbers at that time, because other currency was not obtainable. The dove and the olive branch are the symbol of our society, and have been used since the beginning of its history. The house flag of our missionary ship, the 'John Williams,' and other ships bore three doves in silver on a purple ground, and the dove and olive branch appears on all the publications of our society. They are the natural symbol of a society whose object is the spread of the gospel." Mr. Thompson added that there was no trace of these coins in the society's museum.

Dr. Gunning has other interesting references to these tokens in his article.

To judge by the extreme rarity of these pieces, it is very unlikely that many were struck, and their circulation, if they had any, must have been limited. High prices are paid for specimens by collectors. At a sale some years ago the fivepenny silver piece realised £11 10s., and the tenpenny piece £7 12s. 6d. Dr. Gunning in his article mentions that in Spinks' "Numismatic Circular for 1907" the  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. and  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. were priced respectively £4 and £4 10s.

#### **Durban and Cape Town Tokens**

The scarcity of small change seems only on one occasion to have stimulated Durban to issue tokens to meet the necessity. This was in 1860. The coins were insignificant pieces, the size of farthings. They were made of white metal and bore on one side the words "Sixpence 1860 Natal," in three lines; and on the other side "Durban 6d. Club," also in three lines. Specimens are very rarely encountered nowadays, and at a pre-war sale two fetched £9 17s. 6d.

Compared with Durban, Cape Town is rich in token treasures. There have been at least four issued, and there may have been more. Several old residents who knew Cape Town in the sixties and seventies of last century have assured the writer, on being shown specimens of the four, that there were others, though they could not make definite statements.

#### **The Oldest Cape Town Token**

The oldest of these Cape Town tokens is of the halfpenny size, and has on the obverse: "White & Co., Tea Merchants and Grocers, Cape Town." On the reverse is a finely executed figure of Hope. It is not the stereotyped representation usually forming the crest of the arms of the Cape of Good Hope, which, when in full heraldic splendour, is "a figure of Hope proper vested azure, resting the dexter arm on a Rock and supporting with

the sinister arm an Anchor Sable." The Hope on the coin represents a young woman in a refreshing freedom of pose. She is seated on the ground with an anchor beside her. Her figure is graceful and the design is an elegant and well-balanced one. It is in fact similar to that appearing on the famous three-cornered stamps issued in the fifties and sixties. Above the figures are the words "Cape of Good Hope," and in the exergue below is the date "1861." In minute letters on the ground under the figure is the maker's name and address, "W. J. Taylor, London." Mr. Taylor was medallist to the great London Exhibition of 1851, and several of the finest Australian tokens bear his name.

This instance of Hope "solus" as a coin type brings to mind many coins issued under the Roman Empire on which century after century Hope figured as the type. The Hope personified by the Romans was generally a young female standing or walking, holding in her right hand a flower, her left being usually employed in raising the skirt of her semi-transparent robe. That was the pagan Hope, the Hope that remained behind when Pandora's box was opened and all manner of evils were scattered over the world. The Hope represented on this Cape Town token is the Christian personification, and the tender flower associated with the heathen goddess is replaced in regard to this more sedate figure by the Christian emblem of Hope—the anchor, a symbolism to which St. Paul gave the seal of perpetuity when he wrote that we have hope "as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast."

#### A Strange Craft

The second of these Cape Town tokens is also of the half-penny size, and has on the obverse: "Marsh & Sons, Importers, Cape Town." On the reverse side there appears the representation of a strange craft, the like of which cannot have been seen in Table Bay for many a long year. She is a paddle-wheel steamer with three tall masts. She is evidently of the type which ploughed the seas in the middle of the last century, when sail, almost as much as steam, was the power relied on for propulsion. This type was probably old fashioned when the coin was struck some time in the seventies. The steamer is represented as moving to the left through a choppy sea and has two sails and a jib set. From her tall funnel, which resembles a factory chimney, smoke is issuing, and a flag waves tautly at the mainmast head. The engraving of the die has been well done, and the rigging and cordage of the ship stand out distinctly while the railings of the poop deck are also clearly delineated. Altogether the vessel on the token presents a quaint old-world picture when contrasted with the modern ocean liner with masts degenerated into signal poles and funnels squat compared with her length.

Representations of ships are very common on British colonial coins and tokens. Amongst others they are found on those of Nova Scotia, the Bermudas, the Bahamas and Ceylon, but so far as the writer is aware the particular type appearing on this Cape Town coin has appeared on no other, the inference being that the design was an exclusive one. It may have represented some particular vessel engaged in the South African trade which was a familiar sight to Cape Town in the seventies. It may even have been intended for the old *Enterprise* herself, the first steamship to put into Table Bay. That was in 1825, and the *Enterprise* made the voyage from England in the excellent time of 55 days. Inscribed around the ship is the time-honoured legend "Halfpenny Token, To Facilitate Trade," a legend which has appeared on many tokens before this one.

### Pills, Pens and a Story

Fifty years or so ago, when the token was issued, Marsh & Sons were the agents for a certain brand of pills and another of pens, both of which had a big sale. In those "good old days" money was not so plentiful as it is today, so prices were cut very fine. The retail prices of both the pills and the pens necessitated the use of halfpennies. As the local shortage of coins of the realm of this denomination was acute, these tokens were ordered from England to meet the deficiency as far as the particular trade which was one of the interests of Marsh & Sons was concerned, and well they served their purpose. It is interesting to note in connection with the Marsh token that in 1857 and 1858 a large number of pence and halfpence of very fine workmanship were issued by Professor Holloway in the furtherance of his pills and ointment business, and that these coins were extensively used in the Australian colonies as small change.

A quaint story is told with reference to the Marsh tokens. It appears that once upon a time someone or other obtained access to the firm's safe at which he had no legitimate business. He opened the door—so the story runs—and peeped in. His eyes were soon riveted upon a small, well-filled canvas bag. He lifted it—in more senses than one, as will be seen—and shook it. The pleasing chink of mobilised coins saluted his ears. "Sovereigns!" he probably ejaculated as temptation took him in its toils. A moment later he had decided to treat the eighth commandment as a scrap of paper, and was stealing away with the bag of coins. Reaching a secluded spot, away from all observation, he opened the bag in order to feast his eyes upon its contents. But oh! What a surprise! His hopes fell with a thud on finding that the coins were not of gold but of copper, and tokens at that. In a spirit of mingled disappointment, disgust and fear, he threw the bag on to the roof of the adjoining building, where it was found after many days and returned to Marsh & Sons. The writer has seen one of the tokens from this bag. It was as fresh and bright as the day it was struck, half-a-century ago.

### The Gnu and the Onyx

The third Cape Town token, still another halfpenny one, has on the obverse side "J. W. Irwin, Tea Merchant and Grocer," Cape Town." It was issued in 1879, and is equal in neatness of design and excellence of manufacture to the Marsh token. It was made in England, and is, so far as the writer is aware, the only coin ever circulated bearing the familiar arms of the Cape of Good Hope, which adorn the reverse side of the piece. There is one shield on which, if the specimen is a well-preserved one, can clearly be seen the three fleur-de-lys and the lion rampant with the triple annulets. On the left and right are the supporters—the gnu and the onyx, standing on a scroll, bearing the motto: "Spes Bona." Above the shield is a figure of Hope with an anchor. All these well-known details are clearly seen on this tiny halfpenny. Below the arms is the date 1879 and above are the words "Cape of Good Hope."

### Buying Papers in 1880

There is one field of activity in South Africa in which the demand for small change is very great, and that is the selling of newspapers. In some of the larger towns the price for a long period was paid in silver—it still is in remoter villages and minor towns—and often the supply of tickeys was found not to be too plentiful. When years ago the Johannesburg papers were suddenly reduced to a penny there was a great to-do as to how

they were to be paid for, and prodigious quantities of coppers were necessary to overcome the difficulty. Doubtless before it was overcome, many a lucky newsboy, not having change received the old price for his wares. Doubtless, too, there were many occasions on which they missed sales for the same reason. The Johannesburg papers are twopence now, but, of course, the necessity for maintaining a plentiful supply of small change is just as great.

It seems strange that, frequent as were the occasions in the past when the scarcity of small change caused marked inconvenience, the newspaper proprietors of South Africa, noted as they have been and are for their enterprise, did not take the practical step of dealing with the difficulty by providing their own small change. So far as can be ascertained there has been only one occasion on which such a step was taken, and that was as far back as 1880. In those days there appeared a halfpenny paper in Cape Town entitled the "Evening Express." The proprietor was Mr. Fred R. Lovegrove, who will be recalled by Rand pioneers as the proprietor of the "Diggers' News" of Johannesburg from 1886 to 1889, when it was amalgamated with the "Standard," becoming the "Standard and Diggers' News." Now in 1880 halfpence bearing the Queen's image and superscription were not plentiful in Her Majesty's oversea Dominions, and the Cape was no exception. How then was Mr. Lovegrove to sell his paper readily? He solved the problem by sending to Birmingham—the great manufacturing centre of tokens—and ordered ten thousand to facilitate the sale of his paper. These coins—they are of farthing size—are the fourth variety of Cape Town token. Some of them are still extant; they are of bronze and milled. On the one side are the words "Good for one copy Evening Express," and on the other "Fredk. R. Lovegrove & Co., printers, Cape Town." The "modus operandi" of circulating them was very simple. People would purchase a small parcel, say, 1s. or 2s. worth of them, and be able to buy therewith 24 or 48 copies of the "Evening Express." The scheme answered admirably, and the tokens went out freely and came in freely over the considerable period during which the "Evening Express" was in existence. It is amusing, however, to note that many of them were put to another use than that for which they were originally intended, and that some distinguished Cape Town residents of the day found they made excellent card counters.

#### Ferry Tokens

A well-known feature of the "Fighting Port" is the ferry which connects East London proper with the suburb of West Bank, across the Buffalo River. Forty-one years ago a small change difficulty arose in regard to the payment of the passenger fares of one penny per head, and the Municipality found a way out by issuing a considerable number of penny tokens for use in the ferry service. These coins are of bronze, about the size of halfpennies. There is no artistic feature about them, but they are neatly struck and of solid appearance. On the one side is the value, "1d.," surrounded by the words "East London Municipality," and on the other appears a centre inscription "East London, 1880," encircled by "Payable at the Municipal Office." The piece was issued for a business purpose and has a business-like appearance. Presumably the ferry users purchased their requirements from time to time at the Municipal Office, where also the tokens could be redeemed if desired. They were in use only for a few years. Then the ordinary copper coinage became sufficiently plentiful to meet the requirements of the ferry service and the tokens disappeared.

## Tram Coupons

From ferry tokens to the familiar tram coupons is an easy step. The tramway authorities (municipal and private) in several of the Union towns have at times met their imperative need for small change by the issue not only of books of coupons, but of coin-shaped counters in the shape of discs of metal or composition. Johannesburg had for years counters of nearly all the tints of the rainbow but of uniform design. They bore on one side an impression of the municipal arms and the words "Municipal Tramways, Johannesburg," and on the other "1½d.," which represented the minimum charge for a tram ride. Now the minimum charge is 2d., and all these counters are obsolete. One of them which the writer has seen was re-struck over a coupon for ½d. The name of the town for which it was originally intended is indecipherable, but the remains of an oak wreath can clearly be seen. To an insignificant extent these coupons were used as small change apart from the tram service, much in the same way as stamps are. It was not unknown also for small shops in the suburbs to supply small children with small quantities of sweets in exchange for tram coupons. It would be interesting to know what proportion out of the many thousands of these coupons issued eventually found their way back to the municipal offices. One, however, must not be too inquisitive—the more the Municipality were to the good in respect of unredeemed coupons the better for the ratepayers as a whole.

### Sailing Yacht and Shining Sun

The Boksburg Municipality issued a rather pretty dark blue tram coupon of the same size and value as that of Johannesburg and very similar in its general appearance. Indeed it often passed muster on the trams in the Golden City. Its prettiness consisted in the representation of the municipal arms, the yacht sailing on the lake with the sun shining overhead, and the picks and shovels in the field being more attractive than the formal shield and scroll on the Johannesburg discs. In Germiston a yellow coupon appeared, also of the Johannesburg size and value, and of severe simplicity. Besides the figures "1½d." the only information it afforded was "G.M.," which stood for Germiston Municipality." Pretoria was more ambitious, and brought out an aluminum token with a milled edge and looking very like a shilling in a dim light. On one side it bore the legend "Good for 1½d. stage," and on the other the letters "P.M.T." (Pretoria Municipal Tramways).

### View of Table Mountain

In the Cape Province the Cape Town Tramway Companies have made several ventures in the token direction. Their counters were of the halfpenny denomination. Most interesting was one of aluminum. One side was blank, but on the other side was a representation of Table Mountain and Devil's Peak as seen from Table Bay, with the pier in the mid-distance. Above was "½d." and the perigraph was "Cape Town Tramway Cos." This was of farthing size. Other varieties were made of composition, coloured in shades of green, red and yellow. Some were manufactured with the "½d." as part of the design; on others it was punched subsequently, in some cases above an earlier "1d." and in other cases over the words "Available only between Adderley Street and Sea Point Terminus" or "2½d. adult, available on any advertised 3d. distance." The reverse sides of these coupons bore various advertisements. These Cape Town coupons were in use during the years 1919 and 1920. They fell out of

use when the tram fares were raised and halfpence did not enter into the scale.

A red composition East London tram coupon is of the same size as the Johannesburg variety. It has on one side "1½d." and on the other the word "Tramways" enclosed in an oblong superimposed upon the monogram "E.L.M." (East London Municipality) within a circle.

Possibly there are or were other disc tram coupons in use in Union towns in addition to those above described.

Allied to the various tokens and coupons which have from time to time been used by the public of South Africa in lieu of small change, but in a different category, are the brass tokens which have for many years past been used by the De Beers Company in their compounds in connection with the purchase by the natives of supplies in the company's stores. The use of these tokens is not, however, in consequence of any difficulty with regard to small change, nor are they of value or use excepting in the compounds; in no sense are they currency. The natives receive their wages in cash and buy coupons as required for their purchases in the stores, and should they have any on hand when leaving the compounds they are reconverted into cash. Somewhat similar tokens have been in use on the coffee plantations in Ceylon.

#### **A Rhodesian Device**

Disc-shaped tokens and coupons of metal or composition have not, however, been the only devices adopted in South Africa to remedy the evil of scarcity of small change. Another plan was that tried in Rhodesia during the Boer War, when small cards were issued bearing on one side the printed words:

"The Civil Commissioner, Bulawayo.

"Please pay in cash to the person producing this card the face value of the stamp affixed thereto if presented on or after the 1st August, 1900.

"This card must be produced for redemption not later than 1st October, 1900."

The card was on the same side officially stamped: "Administrator's Office, Bulawayo. H. Marshall Hole, Secretary."

On the other side of the card a postage stamp was fixed, the one in the writer's possession being of the value of one shilling. There were other cards of smaller and larger values.

These cards were a clumsy sort of small change, but they served a turn. Their issue must have resulted in a trifling profit to the Government, for many of the cards were naturally preserved as curios, and many others were lost or inadvertently destroyed. Some of them looked dilapidated objects when they had been in circulation for a few weeks. Even in recent years in Rhodesia the scarcity of metallic coinage has been very marked, with a resultant use of goods-for and chits in the bars and an extra burden of book-keeping in the stores where credit has had to be given for small sums which otherwise would have been paid in cash. Rhodesian small change, of course, means silver values. The common copper has so far not invaded that attractive country to any appreciable extent.

## **THE BURGERS SOVEREIGNS**

About 1874 a Mrs. Russel, of Durban, discovered a 15lb. gold nugget at Pilgrim's Rest. President Burgers bought this nugget for the State and for some time exhibited it at Pretoria. Is it possible that this nugget was ultimately used in the minting of



the thousand Burgers sovereigns which were distributed among the State officials?

E. H. D. Arndt, in his book "Banking and Currency Development in South Africa (1928), says on page 133:

"In 1873, when President Burgers visited the Lydenburg goldfields, he obtained gold nuggets weighing 16 and 23 ounces. In addition he purchased a nugget weighing a little over 119 ounces for £475.

"At the next meeting of the Volksraad in 1874 he produced a supply of sovereigns which he had had coined in England in the meantime. This was no doubt a pleasant surprise to the Volksraad, which resolved to accept as legal tender in the Republic the 837 sovereigns struck from Transvaal gold, which the President submitted and declared to be of the same value as English pounds . . . President Burgers presented every member of the Volksraad with a specimen."

In the Transvaal "Staats Courant" of November 4, 1874, there is a notice signed by Ralph Heaton & Sons, minters to the Queen of England, stating that they had received from the Consul-General of the South African Republic in London a bar of gold weighing 256.275 ounces, and that they had struck from this gold 837 pieces of the exact value and weight of the English pound. The notice in the "Staats Courant" was countersigned by the State Secretary of the Transvaal.

The nugget found by Miss Russel—she was a Miss Russel, and later married a Mr. Cameron, who owned the adjoining claim—seems almost certainly to have been used in the 837 (not thousand) Burgers sovereigns.

## OBSOLETE COINS

By A. S. ROGERS

I have been a collector of obsolete coins—mostly copper ones—from early boyhood. Thousands have passed through my hands, but now only a few hundreds remain.

I have disposed at various times and in various ways of large numbers because I wanted to change the series. I have thrown away many others because they were mere rubbish which came along with a few desirable specimens.

I inherited the taste for numismatics from my father, who specialised in English silver. It was a great treat for me when he unlocked his cabinet and showed me the velvet-lined trays on which coins from a crude Saxon penny of Alfred the Great to an exquisite Gothic crown of Victoria were denominationally and chronologically arranged.

He had many miscellaneous coins also, including some fascinating ancient Greek didrachms with glorious heads of gods and goddesses and some delightfully patinated Roman third brass. The patina on Roman brass ranges generally over green and brown tones and, when unbroken, much enhances the collector's value of specimens.

I became so familiar with the choicest coins of my father's collection—dispersed long ago—that I believe I could identify them today if I came across any of them. I hope they are cherished by their present possessors whoever they may be.

### I Start Collecting

Nearly all my pocket-money—only a few pence a week—was spent on coins, and the first pride of my own collection was a gem of a "dump" halfpenny of George I, dated 1717, which I was

fortunate enough to pick up for two shillings—a wonderful bargain. The early issues of halfpence and farthings of George I were smaller and thicker than those which followed and were called “dumps.”

I gloated over this coin continually and I can see it vividly today in my mind's eye—in all its unsullied perfection. In later years an equally perfect Queen Anne farthing re-awakened the old thrills.

### **My First Cabinet**

I was about 12 years of age when I made my first cabinet, with piercings—each laboriously cut with a pocket-knife—for 300 coins. I have since made more ambitious cabinets, of one of which I was rather proud. Its 30 trays were constructed entirely from soap-boxes, though nobody would have guessed it on looking at them.

I might tell in detail of the boyish pleasures of the hunt for coins, of the joy of a satisfactory “swap” and of the ecstasy of the acquisition of a fine-conditioned rarity, but I must pass on to the time when I sold out at a dreadful sacrifice to help the fund I was raising for my passage from England to South Africa.

### **A Fresh Start**

For a decade afterwards I did no collecting, though I never lost interest. Then, while on a health and holiday trip to Australia, I utilised three showery days in Melbourne in touring the curiosity shops and pawnbroking establishments of the city and laid the foundations of a fresh collection.

Among my purchases were about 40 varieties of Australian penny and halfpenny tokens—the principal copper currency of Australia in the sixties and seventies of the last century—for most of which I paid twopence each.

The Melbourne shops displayed their stocks of old coins in bowls labelled “1d. each, 2d. each,” and so on up the ladder. I have never seen this plan adopted in South Africa. If it were it might encourage coin collecting in this country as a hobby.

### **Specialise**

After my return to South Africa I became a keen collector again, and have remained one ever since. Like the stamp collector, I have specialised, for, if interest is spread over too large a field, it weakens and may die. And the field for coins is much greater than that for stamps. The latter extends over a period of less than a century, and the former over nearly three milleniums.

Like many stamp collectors, too, I have, as already hinted, varied my speciality from time to time. I have been attracted in turn by the English, Irish and Scottish copper coinages, including tokens, with their wealth of historical associations; by the pieces of small change which tell of the growth and development of the British Overseas Empire and by a chapter or two of the vast numismatic volume of Imperial Rome. Latterly, I have given my attention more especially to the coins of South Africa.

What may be termed scientific coin collecting is not a widespread hobby in South Africa. There are many people who have a lot of pieces of old money—good, bad and indifferent—jumbled up in boxes or bags, but comparatively few people who have series of coins systematically arranged and meticulously protected from injury.

The latter point is very important, for the surface of a perfect coin may be almost as delicate as that of a butterfly's

wing, and the pressure of a moist finger or a speck of cigarette ash may mar it irremediably.

While the number of scientific collectors in South Africa is few at present, it is sure to increase with the passing of the years, and many pieces now comparatively easy to acquire will become almost unobtainable rarities.

Unlike the countries of Europe, where hoards of coins of ancient eras are frequently being discovered in places where they have lain since the days when they were current, no such finds have ever been made in South Africa. The ancients of this country had no coined money. It is true that antique coins have occasionally been dug up, but that may only mean they have been buried or lost by their former possessors when the coins were already many centuries old.

### **Roman Relic in Natal**

For instance, a coin of the Emperor Diocletian, who ruled Rome in the latter part of the third century A.D., was found on the north coast of Natal about 20 years ago while a trench was being dug. It would be far-fetched, however, to deduce from its solitary testimony that a Roman citizen of the period had visited Natal.

Again, over half-a-century ago a calabash containing 28 venerable pieces of money was unearthed at a depth of about six feet on the site of a native hut in Eastern Pondoland near the beach. The coins, however, ranged in date from the third century B.C. to the tenth century A.D., and their presence in Pondoland was certainly no evidence that any of the original users of them had ever lived in that country. They must have belonged to some curio collector of comparatively recent times

### **An Exceptional Find**

Coming to coins which have been current in this country since the advent of Van Riebeeck—when the use of money in South Africa practically began—many years ago fifteen Netherlands gulden, dating from 1687 to 1785, were found on the bank of the Great Fish River near Cradock. This was an exceptional find. Single gulden, doits, dubbeltjes and other coins of the old Dutch East India Company have often come to light in the earlier settled areas of the Cape, especially in the Mother City and its vicinity.

### **Washed Up from Wrecks**

Pieces of money washed ashore from old wrecks form another numismatic source for collectors. Those I have seen included silver dollars, ducatoons, gulden and skillings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and were generally more or less waterworn.

In collecting old South African coins I am afraid I have often made myself a nuisance to people who had not the faintest interest in the subject but whom I thought might help me. Whenever I have visited a town I have made what inquiries time and circumstances permitted and have called at likely shops. Further, I have advertised in numbers of papers and almost invariably with success.

### **Search Lasting Years**

For some varieties I have had to wait years before my search was rewarded. One coin for which I sought long—a nickel one of commonplace appearance—was the Durban Club sixpence of 1860. I ransacked the Natal port for a specimen over and over again before I finally obtained one—in answer to an advertisement.

Another nickel treasure—a Daniel & Hyman two shilling token of Bloemfontein, dated 1867—was also long desired before it was secured—again in answer to an advertisement. Years later I unexpectedly came across a sixpence of the same series. If I live long enough I may acquire a half-crown and a shilling and so complete the set.

### A Prized Set

It is only quite recently that I rounded off one prized set. This consists of three tokens—a shilling (brass), a sixpence (brass) and a threepence (copper)—of Blackwood, Couper & Co. of Durban, dated 1861. It is over a dozen years since I bought the threepence in Johannesburg. Several years later I obtained the shilling in Durban, and the other day the sixpence came to me in Cape Town. These coins bear a representation of the firm's shop which was burnt down in 1864. Once in Durban I met an old resident who, as a boy, had searched among the ashes and found a few of the tokens.

There are South African coins for which I am still in search and there are probably others of which I have never heard. When I consider there is no further goal attainable in the South African series I may give my collection to a museum and start a new one.

In coins, as in stamps, there are many alluring series in which, if one excludes expensive rarities, one may find much enjoyment at a reasonable expenditure.

Old South African coins are, as already stated, often dug up and sometimes their battered and corroded appearance, being regarded as evidence of their age, is believed to enhance their value. The exact opposite is the case. Condition is the paramount quality demanded by the fastidious coin collector. A perfect specimen of some coin may be worth, say, a pound; a circulated one from the same dies may be so worn as to be a bad bargain at half-a-crown; perhaps its vicissitudes may have left their mark upon the coin to such an extent that it is dear at sixpence.

A collection of single specimens of South African coins (representing: (1) all varieties of the current series including Kruger money; (2) tokens, good-fors, counters and coupons issued since the middle of the last century; (3) English coins that have been used in this country since the day of George III and (4) the wonderfully varied currency of the old Dutch East India Company period) would comfortably fill a fair-sized cabinet.

## GOLD MONEY AT THE CAPE IN THE DAYS OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIA COMPANY

By A. S. ROGERS

How thoroughly in the old days the church at Cape Town carried out the Christian injunction of giving to the poor was emphasised by O. F. Mentzel in one of his interesting books of reminiscences of life at the Cape in the mid-eighteenth century. In the course of his remarks he mentioned that at the communion services, at which collections for the cause of charity were made, "the more wealthy burghers quietly slipped whole piles of ducats under the napkins that covered the vessels."

This reference to ducats is an interesting indication of the prominent place once occupied in the highly mixed currency of the Cape by the coin which originated in the age of chivalry, the coin which Chaucer and Shakespeare have enshrined in

literature by their allusions to it—the gold ducat. Ducats and double ducats were issued by several European countries, including the Netherlands. Of so high a reputation was their quality that the term “ducat gold” was used for generations to express superior worth.

Mentzel has other allusions to ducats in his writings. One of them is tragic. It is contained in his account of the wreck of the ship “De Vis” near Cape Town one night in 1740. The vessel was wedged between rocks and it was impossible to reach her in a boat, but a stout cable having been successfully adjusted between ship and shore, crew and passengers were hauled to safety, two at a time, travelling in a great copper cauldron. Between 100 and 150 men had been rescued in this manner when, wrote Mentzel, an accident occurred. The steward of “De Vis,” accompanied by his assistant and a boy, climbed into the cauldron. The steward had a lot of money on board and had filled his pockets with ducats, thereby very materially increasing his weight. The combined load was too heavy. One of the iron rings of the cauldron broke and the occupants were precipitated into the sea. The rope was at once slackened to enable them to seize it and support themselves. This the assistant and the boy did and were saved, but “the steward, weighed down by the gold in his pockets, sank like a stone and was drowned.” A contemporary painting of the wreck is in the South African Public Library at Cape Town.

Evidence of the popularity of the ducat among travellers, owing to its universal acceptance and its convenient size and value, is found in the vivid description by the famous French traveller Le Vaillant of the blowing up of the merchantman “Middelburg” in Saldanha Bay in 1781 to save her from falling into the hands of the British, with whom the Netherlands were then at war. Practically all Le Vaillant’s worldly goods and possessions were on board the “Middelburg,” as well as a collection he had assiduously gathered together as a naturalist. He saw the explosion from the shore and was in despair. “What was to become of me,” he wrote, “having no other resources but my fusee, ten ducats in my purse and the thin dress I wore?” Fortunately he soon found a generous friend who rescued him from his predicament.

The Dutch ducat was the size of a modern shilling, but thinner. Its value at the Cape varied from time to time. At the close of the seventeenth century it was 8s. 4d.; in Mentzel’s days, 8s. 9d., and under the English régime in 1800 and again in 1806 it was officially fixed at 9s. 6d.

It was a coin of pleasing appearance with its familiar figure—for the same type prevailed throughout two centuries or more—of an armour-clad knight, sword in one hand and a bundle of arrows in the other, and its Latin motto signifying “Little things grow through concord.” The double ducat was a facsimile on a larger scale. Nearly all the ducats which circulated at the Cape were probably of this variety, though there must have been a few also of the rare Java ducats which were specially struck for the Dutch East India Company in the middle of the eighteenth century. These were very Oriental in appearance, the inscriptions being in Arabic.

Another gold coin which for very many years had a world-wide currency and a high reputation for quality was the Venetian sequin, which ranked at the Cape at exactly the same value as the ducat.

The Venetian sequin was also a coin good to look upon and the figure of Christ within a pointed oval which always appeared

on one side appealed widely to religious sentiment. On the other side was a representation of the Doge of Venice receiving a standard at the hands of St. Mark, the patron saint of the city.

Apropos Venetian sequins an interesting South African episode may be recalled. Away back in the sixties of the last century several European families living in East Pondoland went down to an attractive spot on the coast, previously chosen, for a camping-out holiday. One of the girls of the party, while exploring near the water's edge, chanced to find a golden coin. The discovery caused excitement in the camp and the next morning everyone was down on the beach hunting for treasure trove. Several hundred coins were found altogether, many of them gold, and they were shared among the picnickers. The find was made at the spot on the Pondoland coast close to which lie the remains of the "Grosvenor" East Indianman wrecked in 1782.

The coins then picked up are probably for the most part now widely dispersed, but the writer was once shown eight of them, which had been handed down to a descendant of one of the picnickers. Of the eight two were Venetian sequins.

An impressive gold coin, as heavy as a small handful of sequins and suggesting opulence and magnificence, was the Spanish doubloon which circulated at the Cape until a century or so ago. Like the piece-of-eight, also Spanish, it was a coin of the widest repute. It was in some respects the gold counterpart of that famous silver piece, their weights being identical and their designs during a long period being somewhat similar, including the Spanish king's head and the lions and castles of Leon and Castile. The doubloon, however, was more ornate, having the distinction of its heraldic shield of arms being girt around by a representation of the insignia of the famous knightly Order of the Golden Fleece.

The Cape currency also included the quarter, the eighth and the sixteenth of the doubloon, all charming coins in appearance. Very dainty-looking was the sixteenth, known as the coronilla, or "little crown," which was worth 5s. at the Cape.

A favourite design on European gold coinages which persisted from the Middle Ages for centuries onwards was that of an armed and mounted knight, adapted probably from the coins of ancient Rome, on which the Emperor was often represented on horseback overcoming his enemies or triumphantly entering a captured city. In France this type of coin was called the "cavalier"; in Scotland it was known as the "rider," and similarly in the Low Countries as the "ryder." Naturally Netherlands "ryders" were used at the Cape. They were beautiful coins nearly as large as modern florins, though not so thick. Officially they were known as fourteen gulden pieces and their value was £1 3s. 4d. Here is a description of one in perfect state, which lies before the writer:

Covering the greater part of the field of the coin is a charging horseman, helmeted and armour-clad, with sash flying in the wind and sword raised aloft to strike. An inscription in abbreviated Latin around the horseman indicates that the piece is "golden money of the United Provinces of the Netherlands."

On the other side of the coin is a crowned shield on which appears the Lion of the Netherlands carrying the sword and the bundle of arrows which are wielded by the knight on the Dutch ducat. Above the crown is the date "1751"; on the sides of the shield the denomination "14 Gl." is noted and around is the inscription in Latin "Little things grow through concord," which characterises the ducat.

There were also half "ryders" or seven gulden pieces, exactly like the larger coins, except in size and denominational indications.

An adaptation of the old song "I'd rather have a guinea than a one-pound note" would doubtless have been popular in Cape Town—had it been known—in the days of the Napoleonic wars, when guineas were actually jingled beneath the shadow of Table Mountain and paper money—in rix-dollars—was not in the best of odour. The imaginary guinea of today, as everyone knows, stands for 21s., but at the Cape in 1800 the value of the actual coin was officially fixed at £1 2s. At an early stage of its century and a half of history the guinea in England was worth as much as 30s. The last guineas were coined in 1813, after which sovereigns took their place.

There are numbers of guineas still to be found in South Africa, many of them pierced and worn smooth through long years of dangling on waistcoat fronts; but there are many more of the brass imitation guineas with which after the real coins had become obsolete as currency England was flooded from the factories of Birmingham and elsewhere. Quantities of them have in the course of years found their way to this country. These imitations were used as card counters. There were many varieties—in regard to minor details—and some of them, especially when gilded, bore a close resemblance to genuine guineas.

The French louis d'or also, a gold piece with a wide currency, including South Africa, had a history presenting some interesting parallels to that of the guinea. It was an aristocratic coin and first came into existence in 1640 when the French currency was reformed under Louis XIII, after whom the coin was named. It endured like the guinea for about 150 years and was followed by the democratic twenty-franc piece, as the guinea was by the pound—the plebeian term for the sovereign.

The louis d'or were handsome coins and readily distinguishable from other foreign gold, even to the illiterate, by three heraldic lilies of France within an oval.

"Occasionally," wrote Mentzel in 1783, referring to his South African experiences many years before, "one sees at the Cape a gold coin which in the East Indies equals ten rix-dollars (then 40s.) if stamped, and eight rix-dollars (then 32s.) if unstamped. On account of its elongated shape it is not very popular." This mysterious coin was the Japanese "koban," a thin piece of gold, three inches long, an inch and a half wide, and of oval form. It bore Japanese inscriptions and symbols, and when counter-stamped with a lion, the typical emblem of the Netherlands, was officially admitted to the currency of the Dutch East India Company's possessions.

There is no record, however, of the popularity of a certain other gold coin which once adorned the currency of the Cape ever having been questioned. That coin was the fascinating Johanna of Portugal. It was the size of a modern half-crown, but nothing like so thick. "Joes," as they were fondly termed in most of the British Colonies, represented, in Portugal, where they belonged to the "dobra" series, 6,400 reis each, or about 36s., but they were sometimes assessed higher than that elsewhere. In Ireland, in 1765, they were ordered by proclamation to pass current for 40s.; that was their worth in Canada later, and the same value was adjudged to them at the Cape by Sir David Baird in 1809. Previously, however, in 1782, the Dutch authorities had considered 8½ rix-dollars (34s.) was sufficient, and in St. Helena at one time they came down to £1 13s. 3d.

Although the writer has found no trace of the official recognition in South Africa of another Portuguese coin—the moidore (money of gold)—it was so extensively current in Western Europe and in the New World that numbers of them must have reached the Cape. It was rated in English money at 27s.

The Cape being in such close touch with India and the East generally, it was natural that numbers of Oriental coins should find their way to this country, apart from those officially struck for the Dutch East India Company, of which the Java ducats have already been mentioned. The official coinages also included gold Java rupees, and their divisions issued at different periods between 1766 and 1798. These gold rupees, which were struck from the same dies as the silver rupees, had only one Occidental characteristic and that was the date. But the gold coins of Native Indian princes, including mohurs, also came to the Cape in considerable numbers and were accepted as currency.

Some of these were crude in design and irregular in shape; others were highly finished coins with milled edges. The writer has before him a mohur of 1786 of the type of which the value at the Cape was officially fixed at £1 17s. 6d. Its grandiloquent legend, which is in Persian characters, reads: "Defender of the Mohammedan Faith, Reflection of Divine Excellence, the Emperor Shah Aulum, has struck this coin to be current throughout the Seven Climes. Struck at Moorshedabad in the year 19 of his fortunate reign."

It was mentioned above that the writer had seen a number of coins, relics of the "Grosvenor" East Indiaman. Three of them were queer little objects resembling gold buttons rather than pieces of money. They had been converted into shirt studs, after being picked up on the Pondoland coast. These tiny coins belonged to the famous Indian numismatic family, the pagodas, which originated centuries ago. Each of the shirt studs bore a representation of the god Swami on one side, and on the other there was a five-pointed star which gave this type of money the name of "star pagodas."

No doubt star pagodas were familiar enough at the Cape, but the coin which was officially recognised in this country and the value of which was fixed at 7s. in 1782 and at 8s. in 1806 was the pagoda, a piece of gold not quite so large as a half-sovereign. It had a representation of a pagoda on one side and of the god Swami on the other.

When the writer considers the extraordinary variety of the gold pieces which were current at the Cape from the time of the advent of Van Riebeeck until the British sovereign was installed, he is irresistibly reminded of the diversity of Old Flint's collection described in Robert Louis Stevenson's great buccaneering romance "Treasure Island." Readers may turn to the last chapter to refresh their memories. There is it written:

"I (the boy hero of the story) was kept busy all day in the cave, packing the minted money into bread-bags.

"It was a strange collection . . . English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Georges and Louises, doubloon and double guineas, moidores and sequins, the pictures of all the kings of Europe for the last hundred years, strange Oriental pieces, stamped with what looked like wisps of string or bits of spider's web . . . nearly every variety of money in the world must, I think, have found a place in that collection; and for number I am sure they were like autumn leaves, so that my back ached with stooping and my fingers with sorting them out."

Well practically all the varieties of gold pieces in that famous hoard of fiction were once current at the Cape.