

The Star Thursday 03 October 1889

MONETARY COMPLICATION IN THE CHANNEL ISLANDS.

During a recent visit to these interesting islands, some incidents of which were recorded under the title of "Here and There," the writer was impressed by the number of survivals of old customs and laws having as curious a place in our modern history as the kangaroo has in modern natural science. To an Englishman and outsider nothing can be stranger than the custom of the law and police courts of the islands fining their prisoners in terms of the Norman monetary system of 2,000 years ago, as well as stating the terms of purchase of property in the same "*Livres Tournois*" (Tours pound). It would be reasonable to suppose that a contract would in the present day be passed before the "Court" with its terms stated in pounds, shillings, and pence; but this is not so. It is an absolute fact that an Englishman purchasing property, say in Guernsey, will find his contract drawn up in French and its terms reduced to *Livres Tournois*, the probability being that neither the seller nor the purchaser will understand one word of the contract, and would have to trust to the solicitors whom they employ. The old Tours standards have survived in legal phraseology, but have long passed away in commerce. Jersey, in this respect the more advanced island, has passed through all the stages of evolution, and now has British currency; but Guernsey, on the other hand, has tried hard to prevent the inevitable change, and in consequence suffers from a state of confusion which none but natives understand. To the student of monetary evolution Guernsey offers as good a field for labour as any in the world, for while gaining something from each English and Continental monetary change, it has not lost the long disused systems; in some form or other they all coexist. I was not many hours in Guernsey before I found myself in possession of quite a medley of copper coins. There were English coppers, French coppers, some few Continental pieces, and the local coins. The latter were of two values, eight doubles and four doubles. I asked what a "double" meant, but got no satisfactory reply. It is a survival, and no doubt there is an explanation to be arrived at by the student.

My further inquiry elicited the statement that fourteen Tours pounds were equivalent to two hundred and forty "pieces of eight" (the latter term is of our own coining), and therefore, by calculation, I derived the knowledge that there exists one hundred and thirty seven and two sevenths doubles in a Tours pound. Whether the Tours pound is retained because of this relation to the existing double, or *vice versa*, I do not know. I was assured that the double actually exists, and is about equal in value to the one ninth part of an English penny piece; but I was not fortunate enough to see either the one or two double piece. On learning the fact that there existed local coins, and as I then supposed a local currency, I was anxious to get money exchanged, but very soon found that that would give me a great deal of unnecessary trouble. What I was obliged to do was to empty my trouser pockets of their usual contents and devote one to British and the other to local currency. The reason was the discovery that though local money was the right thing in shopping, its use was by no means universal. The hotels, the lodging houses, the excursion cars, the local steamers, the boatmen, the porters, the lookers-out-for-tips, and last, but by no means least the post office, all demand payment in solid English coins. Now it so happened that a fair proportion of my total expenditure fell into the hands of the above named, and hence my need of the coin of the realm. Again inquiring I found that British money is legal tender, though it is generally considered the correct thing to use the coin of some Continental Power. Before leaving the copper coins, there is a point which puzzled me considerably, and which I can form no conclusion on any ordinary mode of

reasoning. On examining my collection of coins one night (a curious lot they were) I found that the copper consisted of Guernsey eight and four double pieces, Jersey penny and halfpenny pieces, French 10 and 5 centimes, and English pence. The proportionate values represented were Guernsey 50 per cent, French 36 per cent, Jersey 8 per cent, and English 6 per cent. Examining the Guernsey coins, I came to the conclusion that they were of rough Birmingham mintage, and that they were probably worth less than one third their nominal value. The profit on their manufacture must be enormous, and if the Guernsey States could by any means increase their output a great annual gain must be the result. Naturally I looked for an arrangement between the States and the local banks, by virtue of which the latter would collect and export the foreign money and thus throw a double quantity of local coin into circulation, reducing the States' reserves, and increasing the mintage and consequent, profit. What I actually found was the absence of all thought and calculation on the subject; indeed, some reason exists for a belief that the States' authorities carefully guard against what they think is a drain on their copper.

Having, after an hour's careful study of the question, exhausted mental energy, I was glad to get to bed and lose in pleasant reminiscences of green lanes all base thoughts of metallic confusion. On rising I determined not to bother my head with the confusion, but to adhere as much as possible to British money in all my transactions, and without inquiry or care dived into my purchases in town. Soon I found myself again involved in difficulties, for if I paid away a pound, a French franc piece and two-pence were returned to me; if I paid out 1s. when asked to, I found that only 11 ½d. was expected for ½d. was returned. This was very nice, but I wanted to know why it occurred, and found that if a shilling was demanded the islanders expected to receive a franc and two-pence. On asking why they did not use their own shillings, I was told that such a coin did not exist, and that in spite of its nonexistence all prices were stated in £ s.d. A pound, as these islanders understand it, is a value arrived at by taking 240 of their "pieces of eight" and calling it £1. To facilitate everyday exchanges the local banks and the States of the Island issue £1 notes worth these 240 "pieces of eight" and custom speaks of the twentieth part of this value as one shilling, though no other reason is given for the shilling, which clearly has no place or *raison d'être* in the system. Continental coins of all values are found in circulation, and the delightful task of estimating the value of your purchase, stated in local £ s.d. unrepresented in actual coins, in the sovereigns, shillings, sixpences, five franc pieces, two franc pieces, one franc pieces, half franc pieces, English and French coppers, Guernsey 8 and 4 double pieces, which you wildly take out of your pocket keeps one employed until in despair yoy trust to the honesty of the salesman.

Just fancy the training a Guernsey sales man requires for the following transaction, which I faithfully transcribed to paper as it occurred. "The price is 6s., sir." "Can you change my half sovereign?" "Yes, sir: here is your change. Six shillings and threepence makes 6s. 3d., which is seven francs and a half, and four francs and a half make twelve francs, which is 10s. currency. Now I have to give you half a franc and a penny for the exchange on your ten shillings." I pick up my mechanically counted-out change and exchange, and register a mental hope that currency will be a thing of the past when I pass that way again. How long-suffering those Guernsey tradesmen must be. I understand that many of them pay several of their charges in two moneys; for instance, in paying a freight bill to the Great Western Railway, they pay the actual freight in British coin, and the warfage, which is collected by the local steamboat agents, is charged and paid in currency, and therefore in francs.

In all this we have the following proofs, of evolution: — 1. The existence of multiples of an obsolete coin (the double pieces.) 2. The adoption of Continental coin as a convenient decimal 3. The retention of £ s. d. in money columns and in language, though not in money. 4. The gradual replacement of the British £ s. d. actually and tangibly present for the nominal

values. — *Western Morning News*.