

ON SOME STONE CANNON BALLS FOUND AT SOUTHAMPTON.

By A. H. SKELTON.

At the meeting of the Hampshire Field Club held at Southampton in October, 1890, the members were shown at the offices of the Harbour Board a stone cannon ball nearly a foot in diameter, and weighing fifty-four pounds, which was lifted by the Board's steam dredger, whilst at work off the Town Quay, in the year 1888. It was found sunk in the mud and clay, about eight feet from the surface, and is one of several which have been discovered in like manner in the harbour within the last few years. Some of them have been sent to and are now in the Hartley Museum. There is little doubt they were lost overboard in medieval times, and it is submitted that there are strong grounds for believing that these stone balls or "gun stones" formed part of the warlike stores accumulated at Southampton, for shipment to France, by King Henry V., in the year 1415.

Shakespeare depicts the incident of the insulting present to that King by the Dauphin of France of a tun filled with tennis balls, and the King's reply that that mock of his had turned those balls to "gun stones," which would "mock castles down" (King Henry V., act 1, scene 11). In this scene Shakespeare closely follows the chroniclers. Thus in the Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland it is related that the Dauphin, hearing of the King's intention to assert his right to Normandy, Gascony, and Aquitaine, sent him a cask full of tennis balls as a mark of contempt, to which King Henry, greatly indignant, replied that "he would send him in

return some balls for playing at a new kind of game, by means of which the very strongest roofs of their houses would rattle."

The King mustered his forces at Southampton in the summer of 1415; and the same chronicle goes on to state that after suppressing the conspiracy of the Earl of Cambridge and others against him—who were "punished with the loss of their heads, without the north gate" (*i.e.*, the Bargate) "of Southampton"—"he made a speedy voyage with the troops and fifteen hundred ships," and "laid siege to the town of Harfleur by sea and land. This place he vigorously attacked by throwing into it immense masses of stone, by means of his engines of war, as though they were playing with the Frenchmen at the game commonly known as tennis." (Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland, Bohn's edition, pp. 364-365).

From the allusion to the destructive effects of these gun stones on the roofs of buildings, it is evident that they were thrown from the early cannon known as "bombards," at a high elevation, and probably a very low velocity, for in drawings of the period the ball is represented as visible in its flight. The attack on Harfleur as described by the chronicler was therefore evidently a bombardment. That these bombards were in common use at the time is undoubted, and there would obviously be no necessity for so much care in rounding these stones had they been thrown from ballistas or other such like engines.

In the Hartley Museum at Southampton there are two of these stone balls of 11 and 12 inches in diameter, and four smaller ones, found in the harbour or on the shore. Near the S.W. angle of the town walls there are built into it three stone balls, the largest about 22 inches in diameter, the other two about 11 inches each. There are also two halves of about 16 inches each. These are surmounted by the arms of the town, carved in stone, of probably late Tudor period; the whole, it is surmised, to mark the site where the French stormed and captured the town in the year 1338.

In the process of shipping a large quantity of stone cannon balls, some must have been lost overboard. Indeed, such casualties happen in respect of much more valuable materials; thus, it is well known that a few years since a bar of silver was lost

overboard off Netley from one of the mail steamers, and was never recovered. And further, in all probability, there was a surplus stock of these cannon balls left behind and not shipped for France.

If at Southampton there are occasionally found stray specimens of these gun stones, it might reasonably be expected at Harfleur itself many of them must still be in existence, and I am greatly obliged to Captain G. H. Lewis, of the L. & S.W.R. Company's service, for his kindly making enquiries in this matter. He informs me that M. Lennier, director of the Museum of Antiquities, &c., at Havre, stated to him that a large number of stone balls have been and are still found from time to time, within the town of Harfleur. About twenty are in the museum at Havre, and are considered to be relics of the siege of Harfleur by King Henry V., and Captain Lewis adds that many of the finders of these stone balls at Harfleur ornament their gate pillars with them.

In the museum of the Royal United Service Institute at Whitehall, there is a stone ball 11 inches in diameter, weighing 52 pounds, found in the ditch of the Tower of London; and there are some of superior fabric from Malta one foot in diameter, weighing about 80 pounds each.

Perhaps the most noted instance of the use of stone cannon balls in modern warfare, was at the re-passing of the Dardanelles by the British Fleet, under Sir John Duckworth, in 1807, when the Turks fired stone shot upwards of two feet in diameter, and weighing about 800 pounds each, which did considerable execution.

Our past president, Mr. W. Whitaker, F.R.S., has kindly inspected eight of the gun stones found at Southampton (*i.e.* the six at the Hartley, and two at the Harbour Board offices), and informs me that six of them are limestone, and most of them apparently from the Isle of Wight quarries.
