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Notes.

"IMITATIONS OF THE REGAL
COINAGE."

The pieces described by Atkins* as "Imitations of the Regal Coinage," miserable productions though nearly all of them are from the point of view of both artist and craftsman, nevertheless possess an historical interest of their own, if only because their mere existence reveals the inadequate provision of small change by the Government, an omission of which we find complaint throughout the whole of our history.

As to this particular eighteenth century series, the Statute of George II, c. 28, (1755), against false money was generally taken as not including halfpennies and farthings in

the baser metals. For a reason which will be given later, the wording of the Act was perhaps intentionally vague with regard to the copper currency.† This served as a protection to the "Imitations." Under cover of that immunity, however, the regal copper money, being of full weight, was steadily melted down by the counterfeiters to provide metal for their lighter issues; and the more of the former that went to the crucible the more their competition was reduced. Hence, by a Statute of 1771, the imitating of any of the "Tower Halfpence and Farthings," as the legal copper coins were termed,‡ was made a felony,§ then punishable by death. This explains the evasive, often grotesque, types and legends that occur on so many and were supposed to help the utterers to cheat the gallows. The eighteenth century year-dates placed on the reverses of most of these coins we need not accept very literally: a considerable proportion of them, indeed, are obviously impossible. They range from 1721 to 1798. The seventeenth century dates which are found on a few are manifestly all fictitious. Six only of the halfpennies bear the word "token," though it might have served as an *altera securitas* against prosecution. I have not met with it on a single farthing. The great majority of them seem to be earlier than the late eighteenth century token series, but that some were contemporaneous with it is evident from these being light counterfeits of the genuine tokens, the imitating of which involved no legal risk; for though the latter were, till the Act of 57 George III, c. 46, winked at by the authorities, no penalty attached to forging copies of them.

These "Birmingham Halfpence" || are spoken of by Raspe¶ as being fabricated by "shabby, dishonest, button-makers in the dark lanes of Birmingham and London." Similarly, "R. Y." in the *Gentleman's Magazine*** writes of "the clumsy and paltry productions which are hourly issuing

† Ruding, 'Annals of the Coinage,' 1840, ii, p. 81.

‡ Lord Liverpool, 'Treatise on the Coins of the Realm,' 1805, p. 192.

§ Ruding, ii, p. 83.

|| Ruding, ii, p. 80, &c. Cf. Southey, 'The Doctor,' chap. cxx.: "He picked it up, and it proved to be a Brummejam [half-penny] of the coarsest and clumsiest kind, with a head on each side."

¶ 'Catalogue of Gems,' 1791, *Introd.*, p. xlii.

** Sept., 1796.

* The Tradesmen's Tokens of the Eighteenth Century, 1892, pp. 385-95.