

# HEADS AND TAILS



*EXCEPT for pennies tossed aloft in the "two up" ring, most New Zealand soldiers are now unfamiliar with their country's coinage. Even in the piping days of peace it was sometimes difficult to remember details about coins in constant use—as many quiz programmes have shown. How many can describe the reverse sides of current N. Z. coins now? It's not easy is it?*

Since 1933, New Zealand has had her own silver coinage minted in distinctive design by the Royal Mint in England. In 1939, pennies of New Zealand design were issued, and to-day coins to the value of over L2,200,000 are in circulation. Before the introduction of its own coinage the Dominion relied on that of Great Britain with a sprinkling of Australian pieces for its small change. The story of the evolution of British coins from the first primitive forms to the present-day pennies, threepences, half-crowns etc., is an interesting one.

To the ancestors of the Greeks is owed indirectly the first coinage of the British Isles. It was Philip II., King of Macedonia and Master of the famous gold mines of Crenides, who coined the golden staters which were introduced into Gaul via the Greek Colony of Massalia (Marseilles), and later copied by the Greeks themselves. These imitations were in turn copied by the ancient Britons, who obtained them in the process of trading with the Gauls. An authority on coins thinks that there was a native coinage in Britain as early as 150 B. C. if not earlier and mentions Kent as the probable locality in which the coinage began.

The penny was apparently first issued about A. D. 706—that is during the

times of the Saxons. It was made of silver. A few halfpennies and possibly some farthings were also coined, but at the time it was the custom when requiring change to cut pennies into halves and quarters. For six hundred years the silver penny remained the chief, and almost the only denomination in circulation. It was coined by nearly every sovereign until Queen Victoria's reign when it appeared as Maundy money. This last was a special issue of coins made for the royal alms which were bestowed every Maundy Thursday upon selected poor people, the custom having its inception in the reign of Charles II.

There was a time when pennies were made of gold, this being in the reign of Henry III., who struck a gold penny in 1257 equivalent in value to twenty silver pennies. This was the only occasion on which a gold penny appeared in British coinage. Its advent, moreover, was notable because it was the first gold coin to be minted in the British Isles.

Charles II. was also responsible for the first English copper pennies and the first numismatic representation of Britannia, which appears on the reverse side of their penny. The original model of Britannia was, according to the popular legend, none other than "La Belle Stuart", who afterwards became the Duchess of Richmond. She was chosen, so it was said, because she was the royal favourite. Despite a confirmatory reference to this story by Pepys in his *Diaries*, some authorities are sceptical of the truth of the legend.

Of Britannia, the Chief Clerk to the Deputy Master of the Mint states in a