

III.

THE METHUEN CUP: A PIECE OF SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SCOTTISH PLATE. BY FRANCIS C. EELES, F.R.HIST.S., F.S.A. SCOT.

At the sale last year² of certain plate belonging to Field-Marshal Lord Methuen, G.C.B., at Messrs Christie's, there was sold to Messrs Crichton Brothers, Old Bond Street, London, W., for the sum of £3200, a sixteenth-century silver-gilt cup and cover of very unusual importance. Not of great size, special delicacy of craftsmanship, or exceptional design, its outstanding interest centres in its being almost certainly of Scottish manufacture. It is therefore worth while to put upon record an exact description of it, more especially as it is understood to have been bought for a client in America, and has probably left this country.

The cup is hemispherical and shallow, having a cover of wavy outline and of no great height. It has an octagonal rock-crystal stem, and a circular base with an ogee outline. There are mouldings or flanges at the foot and at the lip. Four small S-shaped brackets rise from the upper part of the base in apparent support of the ornamental necking out of which the stem rises: there is a narrow band of silver-gilt round the middle of the stem, and small curved brackets project in seeming support of the bowl from the necking or socket at the top of the stem. The cover is surmounted by a small crystal ball surmounted by a ring in the form of a serpent.

The total height is 7 inches: to the lip of the bowl, 5 inches. The bowl is $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, the foot $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter. The rock-crystal stem is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, and $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch thick.

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. liv. pp. 36 f.

² 25th February 1920, Messrs Christie, Manson & Woods, 8 Great King Street, London, S.W.1; No. 87, p. 18 of sale catalogue.

There are three incised inscriptions: one in broad Scots and the other two in Latin, in capital letters between incised lines encircling the cup and cover. The vernacular inscription is arranged in three bands, two on the cover, beginning with the one furthest from the top, and one on the cup just below the lip. The Latin inscriptions are one in a single band round the middle of the base, the other upon the ring which encircles the stem.

These inscriptions read:

On cover—

+ GIF. YAT. YOY. HES. AFRIND. OF LANG + SVVPOS. HE. SVMTIM.
DOV. YE. VRANG + OPPRES. HIM. NOT. BOT. AY. OF. MEIN §§ §

At top of cover—

THE. KANDES. YAT. AFOR. HAS. BEIN. MAL §§ §

On bowl—

+ AT. YI. BVVD. QVAN. YOY. ART. SET + THINK. ON YE. PVIR.
STANDIS. AT. YI. ZET + LOVE. GOD. DO. LAV. KEIP. CHERATI +
SVA. SAL. AL. GRACE. ABOVNDAND. BE §§ §

On ring round stem—

.E.
EX. DONO. G.D. † B.M. ‡

On foot—

‡ ‡ § QVCQVID. AGAS. SAPIENTER. AGAS. ET. RESSPICE. FINEM §§

†=four-leaved ornament set lozenge-wise. ‡=small spray. §=leaf.

The lettering is Roman but with a slightly Gothic touch, and an occasional Lombardic admixture. This combination is very usual shortly before and during the middle of the sixteenth century. The leaves and sprays used for filling up gaps are rather rude.

The inscription on the ring round the stem may very well be of later date.

The inscription band round the base is treated as a ribbon or scroll.

Beneath the foot is the maker's mark, a small shield with the initials Vh—a capital V and a small h. This is the only mark.

Inside the bowl is an incised medallion, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter, containing the sacred monogram ih̄x̄ in black letter, with the contraction mark through the top of the middle letter, on a kind of shaded or stippled background. This is enclosed within two concentric circles with leaves between them forming a kind of wreath.



Fig. 1. The Methuen Cup.
(Reproduced by kind permission of the Editor of *Country Life*.)

The presence of this medallion in no way points to the cup having been made for a pix or ciborium for use in church. Nothing was more common than to place the sacred monogram upon anything or everything for secular use.

Notwithstanding this, and the superficial resemblance of the cup to a ciborium, there is no reason to suppose that it was ever intended for anything else than a piece of table plate.

The date of the cup is probably the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

°In the list of silversmiths given in the appendix to Dr Burns's *Old Scottish Communion Plate* (Edinburgh, 1892), there seems no one whose initials correspond to Vh, but it is not impossible that further research may succeed in identifying the maker.

The cup was illustrated with some of the rest of Lord Methuen's plate in *Country Life*, 14th February 1920, pp. 197 *sq.*, and briefly described by Mr H. Avray Tipping.

It has usually been assumed that the Methuen family are descended from John Methuen and his son Paul, who left Scotland in the sixteenth century, the latter taking orders and becoming a Prebendary of Wells. His son was vicar of Frome in Somerset (*ob.* 1640), and his grandson Paul became one of the most famous men in the woollen industry of Bradford-on-Avon in the seventeenth century. It is therefore possible that the cup was brought from Scotland as far back as the middle of the sixteenth century. It may have come from Methven, near Perth, the lordship of which is said to have been given to the family as far back as the time of Malcolm III. But this is all a matter of conjecture.

Sir James Balfour Paul, Lord Lyon King-of-Arms, informs me that "the Scottish history of the Methuens is very obscure. Burke's *Peerage* says that the Rev. Paul Methuen, Prebendary of Wells, was the son of a John Methuen, who fled from Scotland in consequence of the part he had taken in promoting the Reformation. This is hardly correct; there was no doubt a Paul Methuen who fled from Scotland, and he may have been the son of a John Methuen, but of this I have no proof.

"What is true is that Paul was originally a baker in Dundee, who became a convert to the doctrines of the Reformed Faith. He was appointed minister of Jedburgh in 1560, but in 1562 he was excommunicated and deposed for adultery with his servant. He went to England, but came back to Scotland in 1566 and submitted himself to the General Assembly. They pronounced a really savage sentence on him, condemning him to stand in the stool of repentance at Edinburgh, Jedburgh, and Dundee, with other humiliating accessories. He went

through part of this, but, overwhelmed with shame, he left for England again, though Randolph, the ambassador, says that there was report that he was drowned in crossing the Tweed.

“Considerable sympathy was expressed with his case, and it is possible that he may have become Prebendary of Wells; he seems to have been quite a decent fellow notwithstanding his unfortunate lapse. But I may point out that there is no proof whatever that Paul Methuen, the Prebendary, and Paul Methuen, the ex-baker and minister of Jedburgh, are the same man. We do not even know if he ever married. The pedigree from the Prebendary will be found fully detailed in Burke.”