

The Church Plate of Berkshire.

[Copies can be obtained from the author at The Grange, East Hagbourne, near Didcot, Berks.]

By J. W. WALKER, O.B.E., F.S.A., and M. I. WALKER, R.R.C.
(Privately published, £2 2s. od.).

MANY of the inhabitants of Berkshire will have heard of the important work which has just been issued by Mr. J. W. Walker, O.B.E., F.S.A., on Berkshire church plate, assisted by his daughter, Miss Margaret I. Walker, R.R.C. The compilation of this book has been a very laborious task, entailing personal visits to all the parishes in the county for the purpose of examining the contents of every plate chest. It may have escaped the attention of some few of our readers, who may wish to learn something of its contents. It is a very handsome volume, worthy of the royal county, and it does infinite credit to the accomplished author.

Mr. Walker is a native of Yorkshire, where as an antiquary and historian he won golden spurs, was for some time Hon. Secretary of the old-established Yorkshire Archæological Society, excavated abbeys and rendered many important services to his native shire. It was a distinct gain to Berkshire archæology when he came to reside in the county at East Hagbourne, and he has already done much to assist the county Antiquarian Society in many ways, but he has eclipsed all his previous efforts by the production of this monumental work, the result of much careful research and infinite labour. H.M. The Queen has recognised its importance and value by graciously accepting the dedication of the work, and the Lord Bishop of Oxford has been pleased to contribute a preface, in which he testifies to the importance of the work, and to the energy and zeal of Mr. Walker, who has been so ably assisted by his daughter. His Lordship states: "One of the most frequent causes of the loss and disappearance of objects of great value is lack of knowledge of their existence. The existence of an inventory such as this, besides the intrinsic interest of its information, will be

of the utmost value to those who are responsible for the safe keeping of the plate." Many of us have seen church plate preserved in museums. The British Museum has a fine collection. But when this happens, as our Bishop wisely remarks, "they become mere items in a catalogue. There is all the difference between a paten and chalice in a glass case in a museum and similar articles still in use by parishioners in the place where some long-departed donor placed them."

Mr. Walker gives some wise words about the custody of these sacred vessels. They should not be sold, exchanged or remodelled. They have been consecrated to the service of God, given by pious donors and been in use for generations, and should therefore be very precious to those parishioners whose predecessors have partaken from the communion cup in the Holy Sacrament.

Some pieces of Berkshire old plate have been transformed from their original shape into new forms to meet changes of fashion. No words can be too strong in condemnation of such practices at the present day. Some old plate, deemed precious, has been placed in a bank as a protection against burglary. Mr. Walker protests against this, as the plate may be forgotten and ultimately lost to the parish. It should be kept apart from other plate, as he found some so intermixed with the private possessions of a vicar that there would be danger of it being sold with his other household goods by his executors. In one case an ancient cup had migrated with the rector of a Berkshire parish from its original home in Yorkshire ! This was happily restored.

The author contributes a valuable and learned historical introduction to this work, recalling the mention by Bede of a silver chalice at Jerusalem which is said to have been the veritable cup used by our Lord at the Last Supper, and the Holy Cup of Valencia, one of the most sacred relics of Christendom, and the greatest treasure of the cathedral of Valencia in Spain. Its custodians declare it to be the actual cup. Glass vessels were early in use, and also those made of horn, leather and even wax.

Careful references are given for each statement, and illustrations of each important piece shown. The earliest existing chalice is known as the Antioch Chalice, and was discovered by some Arabs as late as 1910, and its date is said to be the IVth century. Like most valuable things it has been acquired by an American and gone to New York.

Want of space prevents a description of these early Christian treasures, and the reader is referred to the book itself, which records the vicissitudes of English plate in general and of Berkshire in particular. Strange to say I can find no mention of a very early piece now deposited in the Reading Museum, which came from the Saxon graveyard discovered near the eastern end of the King's Road several years ago. It was the custom in Saxon and later times to place in the coffin of a priest a pewter or silver chalice, and this one was evidently designed for that purpose. The oldest Elizabethan cup Mr. Walker discovered at Buckland (1565) and the second oldest is the Barkham Cup, fashioned a year later, of which, together with the paten of 1660, presented by John Stoughill (not Stronghill as in the text), "when he was head churchwarden Anno Dominy 1664," illustrations are given.

Mr. and Miss Walker are to be cordially congratulated upon the production of this magnificent book. It has been to them, we feel sure, a labour of love, though a somewhat expensive one. Even if all the copies are sold there will still be a considerable loss. However, a large number has been sold and only a few left, and these copies will greatly increase in value, as there is not the remotest possibility of the book being re-published. The present cost is two guineas, and readers are advised to purchase one before the edition is entirely exhausted.

P. H. DITCHFIELD.