

THE CHURCH PLATE OF THE COUNTY OF WARWICK.

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In tracing the history of the Church Plate belonging to the county of Warwick, I would wish at the commencement to draw your attention to the east window of the south aisle of Brinklow church, once a chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. For as we gaze upon that window, covered with peerless illustrations of the golden chalices of our old national church, we are able to realise the beautiful enrichment of the altars of the cathedrals, and parochial churches, when in the fourteenth and fifteenth, and early part of the sixteenth century, on high festival they were adorned with communion plate of the highest excellence, and of the best and most artistic workmanship. In this church, worthy in many other respects of the visit of the archæologist and the historian, many an artist now comes to make drawings of these paintings of the old chalices, so that they may be reproduced in our own age, to be used for the honour and glory of God.

The first account we possess of the communion plate of our parish church is the inventory of Church goods, made in 1552, by order of Edward VI. The inventories of our county I have carefully studied; and the first thing that struck me was the great devastation that there had been previous to that time, in the stores of communion plate. For when we compare these records with the requirements enforced by many of our Archbishops, as for example Archbishop Winchelsea, 1293, and 1313, in respect to the church goods of our parishes, the amount of church plate recorded in them is exceedingly small. And when we add to the plate belonging to the parish church, that which

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was used in the Lady and other chapels, and especially that belonging to the chantrys which were so often attached to our churches, and where the Blessed Sacrament was daily celebrated, we see at a glance how considerable the church plate must have been that was found in each parish before the Reformation.

At the dissolution of the chantries, and chapels, the properties belonging to them were seized at once by the Royal Commissioners. Nothing was left that had belonged to them except the bare walls. Their endowments and church goods were taken by the Crown. Nothing, therefore, was left to its parish church except that which could be proved to belong actually to it, in the way of endowments, or of church goods. Still, much plate must have remained. But from the year 1536, in different ways, the church plate considerably diminished. Sometimes this was caused by the action of commissioners sent by royal authority; often the plate was stolen. In a few instances a portion was sold for repairs, and for defraying the necessary expenses entailed by altering the churches, so as to make them adapted for the ritual of the reformed prayer-book; and for the purchase of new service books, the homilies and other books. Some plate also was sold to glaze and repair the windows, out of which its fine old painted glass had been ruthlessly taken away.

In the year 1552, commissioners consisting of the country gentlemen of each county, city, bishoprics, and towns, were appointed to take surveys and inventories of the goods, plate, jewels, bells, and other ornaments belonging to all churches and chapels within the realm. These commissioners were to leave one chalice in each church, together with a small portion of the other church goods, and at least one bell. The ostensible object of these commissioners was to ensure the preservation of all church goods that remained. But behind the scenes we find that other causes were at work. In the Council book, March 3, of the same year, we find the following entry: "It was that day agreed that, forasmuch as the King's Majesty has need presently of a mass of money, therefore commissions should be addressed in all shires of England, to take into the King's hands such plate as remaineth, to be applied to the King's use." And again, on 21st

April, Edward, himself writes: "It was agreed that commissioners should go out and take certificates of superfluous plate for mine use." The commissioners were, therefore, appointed, and we have their reports. The first thing I would remark in reference to these reports is the exceedingly few chalices (each chalice had a cover used as a paten, therefore we will say chalices and patens) that they found. In only a few churches were there two chalices. There was, for example, only one in the Warwick church. There was a fair amount of vestments, altar cloths, brass candlesticks, censers, and holy water pots, though of these in the hundred of Barlichway and Kineton, there were not so many as in the other two, while around Coventry there seem to have been many churches, where nothing was left at all, as we have no inventory for them. So that there seems to have been hardly anything, after paying the expenses of the commission to fill the needy pocket of the poor young king. These lists are given in a summary form in my account of the different parishes of Warwickshire.

During the reign of Mary the small amount of plate that remained, as far as we can learn, was safely kept, so we must arrive at the conclusion that when Elizabeth became queen most of our parish churches possessed a chalice of the old shape as well as other ornaments for the church and minister. The question then arises, "how came it to pass that all these old chalices have passed away." The answer is as follows:—In 1559, Archbishop Parker enquired in his visitation articles, Question No. 5, "whether the curate or minister do minister in any profane cups, bowls, dishes, or chalices heretofore used at mass, or else in a decent communion cup kept for that purpose." In 1576 Archbishop Grindall made the same enquiries. How Archbishop Parker, who ever loved primitive and ancient customs, could have issued the first of these questions passes my comprehension. If the brass censers used by Corah and his company were sanctified, even the greatest Puritan ought to have allowed, with the open Bible before him, that these chalices could not have been profaned, however superstitious the older rites might appear to him. The result was that the old chalices disappeared, so we find nothing remaining of them in the

church plate that has come down to us from the sixteenth century except in a few very rare instances.

Amongst the communion service of this county, and I have personally examined the larger portion of them, a fair number of the Elizabethan communion cups still remain—perhaps some twenty or thirty. They are all, as usual, very much of the same pattern; and this resemblance of the Elizabethan chalice is somewhat curious, as we can find no pattern selected and ordered by authority to be used at this time, and yet all over the kingdom one pattern is to be found. Sometimes they are called the £5 cup, as £5 was allowed to poor parishes for the purchase of them. The cup has a cover, which, as Grindal tells his clergy, may be used as a paten. They are, as a rule, about five inches high, in some cases rather higher. A few years later on we find another shape sometimes used, which was called the Puritan pattern. The cup itself became enlarged, and the ornamentation of the stem was different.

Amongst the plate of the sixteenth century, I must mention the fine silver-gilt chalices, with cover, belonging to the Holy Trinity Church, Coventry. In some instances these old communion cups and covers have passed out of use; modern service, much less elegant and less adapted to the purpose, having supplanted them of their birth-right. I am glad to say that in some instances I have been the means of bringing them back again to their proper place and use. With the advent of the seventeenth century, we find the use of flagons becoming frequent. I cannot but think that their introduction was caused by the Puritan method of partaking of the Holy Communion, which made it more of a meal than a sacramental act; and which culminated at the time of the Commonwealth, when they sat round the Lord's board instead of kneeling before it, and as a consequence, much more wine was consumed. From the beginning of the seventeenth century the shape of the chalice became varied, and since then there has not been any regular shape or size of the chalice in general use.

In Warwickshire the distinguishing feature of the church plate in this, the seventeenth century, is the magnificent Dudley plate, given by Alicia Lady Dudley,

relict of Sir Robert Dudley, to those parishes in which she had property. The earliest gift seems to have been presented in about 1630, the latest 1665. This plate is of repoussé work, most probably Spanish make. As Archdeacon Lee says, it much resembles the plate which is now to be seen at Seville and other cathedrals in Spain. It consists generally of one large chalice; the cup part is ornamented with leaves in it, which seem to be of appliqué work; one paten, one large flagon, one deep bowl, which is, I imagine, the decent bason for the alms of the people, and a plate. The following entry in one of the registers will give a good description of these munificent gifts:—"Whereas her Grace the Duchess of Dudley—a foreign title—in the county of Middlesex, owner of land and tenement in Mare Cliff and Barton, in this parish, hath out of her pious disposition and benevolence towards the church, freely given and bestowed this Communion plate, to wit: a large flagon, a bread bowl, and a great chalice, (in other churches there are two plates), besides all three having covers belonging to them, the said plates being richly gilt, and garnished with pictures and flowers; for the use of the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to be administered in the same church as an ornament suitable for the service of that most sacred banquet. With and upon this condition that the sacred plate shall for ever solely remain for the use aforesaid, and shall not be diverted, employed, or disposed of, for any other use; and upon this further condition, that if at any time hereafter the vicar, churchwardens, or other officers or inhabitants of the said parish for the time being, shall presume or endeavour to alienate sell, or embezzle, or otherwise dispose of the plate aforesaid, or any part thereof for the use aforesaid, that these gifts above mentioned shall become void and frustate, and be vested in the said Duchess, her heirs and assigns, who shall and may have lawful right to demand, sue for and recover the same or the value thereof, from the parties so alienating, selling, and embezzling, or otherwise disposing of the plate aforesaid."

In examining our church plate I cannot fail to notice how small a portion of it dates from before the time of the Civil War. No doubt a good deal of the old plate dis-

appeared at that time, partly by being abstracted from the churches, partly from being melted down to defray the expenses of the war and the necessities of the time. With the advent of peaceful days, after the restoration in 1660, the churches were refurnished with communion services. But, unless I am much mistaken, a considerable portion was, through want of money, made of pewter. Still, large gifts of silver plate were made, much of which is decidedly good of its kind. And, when the Church had regained her position in the reign of Queen Anne, large gifts of plate were made which were continued to be made till the middle of last century. This was the time and period when the Holy Communion was more frequently celebrated than at any other time since the Reformation, till the present church revival. Then weekly celebrations were frequent in London and other large towns—in some cases there were daily celebrations, as we see in the "*Pietas Londinensis*" and other books of a like nature. During this period the plate of our shire was naturally much increased, and the beautiful specimens of silver-gilt plate to be seen at Baginton and Cubbington belong to this period. As the century passed on, but few services of communion plate were added, and it was not again till after the peace of 1815, and when quieter times prevailed, that our churches were once more enriched with the pious gifts of her children. But here I must not omit to mention the Stoneleigh plate given in 1805.

Since the great Church revival, which dates from 1835, numerous beautiful additions have been made to our church plate, and once again we see the form of the old chalice reappearing in our churches. Amongst these gifts of chalices stands pre-eminent those which belong to the Parish Church of Leamington, which, though given in our own days, really belongs to the time of Henry VIII. The cup of the chalice is silver gilt, richly embossed with figures. Round the lower part of the cup are designs, taken from the events in our Blessed Lord's life. On the central knob are the figures of faith, hope, charity, and justice. Round the foot we see Eve in the temptation, Melchisedech and Abraham, Moses striking the rock, the Israelites gathering manna. There is also a second chalice, which seems to have been obtained to match, as far as

possible, the one I have just alluded to. It is of more modern date, but very handsome. The knob is ornamented with cherubs; on the foot are the emblems of the four Evangelists. This cup is enriched with carving put on like appliqué work. It is of English make, and is unique of its kind, as at the period at which it was made no chalices were made in England, excepting in the shape of cups. Mention, too, must be made of the chalice at Ipsley, which has two handles, the Hall Mark is 1682, the corner part is embossed with flowers.