

## THE MERCERS' COMPANY'S PLATE.\*

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London and Middlesex Archæological Society,

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THE MERCERS' COMPANY in ancient times possessed a large quantity of silver and silver-gilt plate. The troubles in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries compelled them to sell nearly all of it, and only two pieces remain which were in the Company's possession in the 16th century. In 1522 Henry VIII. made war with France and Scotland and compelled the City of London to lend him £20,000, of which this Company contributed £3,320. It is stated that the Company sold all their plate to help them to produce this sum of money. The two pieces of plate which belonged to the Company in the 16th century, and which still remain in the Company's possession, are The Leigh Cup and The Waggon and Tun.

THE LEIGH CUP is of silver-gilt and weighs 65 $\frac{3}{8}$  ozs.; it is 16 inches high and 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter. It is, with the exception of the Anathema Cup at Pembroke College, Cambridge, the earliest covered cup known to be hall-marked. It bears a small letter "b," the plate mark of the year 1499-1500, and it also bears a maker's mark. Inside the cover is engraved a double rose with a large seeded centre and round the cover and body of the cup the following couplet is inscribed in small gold capital letters in blue enamel:—

“ To elect the Master of the Mercerie, hither am I sent,  
“ And by Sir Thomas Leigh for the same intent.”

Sir Thomas Leigh was admitted to the freedom of the Company in 1526, was Warden in 1544 and 1552 and Master three times, viz., 1554, 1558 and 1564. In 1558—the year Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne—he was Lord Mayor, and in that year he was knighted. He died on 17th November, 1571, and was buried in Mercers' Chapel. The cup must have been in the possession of the Company before Sir Thomas Leigh's death, because it is mentioned in the first list of plate to be found in the Company's

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\* For an earlier account of the "Plate of the Mercers' Company," see the article by G. R. French, in the Society's Transactions, Vol. IV., 1871, pp. 147-150, with an illustration of "The Leigh Cup," plate facing p. 147.

books under date the 23rd July, 1569. But the bequest of the cup appears in Sir Thomas's will in the following words:—

“ I give and bequeath to my loving Brethren, the  
 “ Company of the Mercers, one faire cupp, and standing cupp  
 “ of silver, all guilt, garnished with maidenheads, roses and  
 “ flaggins, with a cover of the like work enamelled blew,  
 “ as the boddy of the cupp is, with posies therein graven,  
 “ and a maiden in the knoop, with a unicorne fawning on  
 “ her lap; and the same cupp, I give them, to use at the  
 “ chooscing of the Wardens of the Company, if they shall  
 “ think it soe good.”

The Company has thought it “ soe good,” for every year since the cup has been used at the election of the Master and Wardens, and those are the only occasions that the cup is used now.

There are three copies of the cup in existence. One is in the South Kensington Museum, another is in the Museum founded at Charlottenburg by the Empress Frederick of Germany when Crown Princess. The third copy was given by this Company to the Grocers' Company, who kindly lent us their Hall for our entertainments forty years ago when parts of these premises were rebuilt. A copy of the cup was offered to the Prince of Wales when he was admitted to the freedom of the Company last July, but H.R.H. preferred to have a copy of one of the Sydenham Mentieths.

THE WAGGON AND TUN.—This piece of plate is of silver gilt, and at one time moved along the table by clockwork, and it bears the arms of the City and the Mercers' Company. The waggon weighs 64 ozs. and the tun 40 oz., and the workmanship is exquisite. The waggoner or coachman is not the original one, and probably there have been several, as it is known that the present figure was made during the last century. In a document entitled “ Note of plate lost by William Time, the Company's butler,” in the year 1643, among other items it is stated that the coachman, valued at 13s. 4d., was lost. The waggon and tun were made at Breslau, probably in the early part of the 16th century, as they bear the mark (w) of that town, together with a mark which no doubt is the maker's mark. A copy of this piece of plate is in the South Kensington Museum. It was given to the Company by William Burde, who was admitted a freeman in 1548, was Warden in 1564 and 1573 and Master in 1588. He presented the waggon and tun to the Company during his second Wardenship in 1573. He was a merchant of repute,

and in 1560 was appointed *Comptroller of the Petty Customs*. In 1571 he was the subject of a State Trial, his alleged crime being that of concealing Customs from *Queen Elizabeth*. But he obtained a certificate that he had cleared himself from the charge, and a copy of that certificate is preserved in the Company's records.

**TWO SILVER MENTEITHS.**—Given to the Company by William Sydenham for the use of the Hall, in which his land lottery was drawn, these bowls have lion handles and scolloped edges; the centres are fluted, and they stand on gadrooned feet. The Company's arms are on one side and William Sydenham's arms on the other. They are 9 inches in height and 13 inches in diameter, and each weighs 72 ozs. 15 dwts. The date mark is 1699, and the maker's mark "Ti" with a mullet, or star of 5 points, above and below, standing for Robert Timbrell, of London. It was a copy of one of these bowls that the Prince of Wales accepted in July, 1919.

**EARL OF NORTHAMPTON'S CUP AND 2 SALTS.**—The cup, which is plain but very massive, weighs 68 ozs. 16 dwts. It bears as a date mark a Lombardic "T" for the year 1616 and a maker's mark "S.O." in a shaped shield. The larger of the 2 salts weighs 24 ozs., and the smaller 5 ozs. 5 dwts., and both bear as a date mark the small italic letter "a" for the year 1618, and as a maker's mark "R.W." in a shaped shield over a cinque-foil. The cup was given to the Warden and Poor Men of Trinity Hospital, in Greenwich, which is under the Company's management, by Thomas Earl of Arundel and Surrey, great nephew and heir of the Earl of Northampton. Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, was described by Bishop Godwin as "The learnedest among the nobility and the most noble among the learned." He was the second son of the poet Earl of Surrey, and was born about the year 1539 at Shotesham in Norfolk, when his father and mother were in flight towards Norwich Castle. Subsequently made Earl of Northampton, he built a hospital at Greenwich for a Warden and 20 poor men—12 from the parish of Greenwich, and 8 from the parish of Shotesham. The poor men of Shotesham are now in an *Alms-house of their own at Shotesham*.

**BANK OF ENGLAND LOVING CUP.**—Presented to the Company by the Bank of England. The Bank, which was established in 1694, carried on its business in Mercers' Hall for a short time. The gift is described in the second Warden's accounts:—

"Item, two large silver bowles, guilt with gold, presented  
to the Company by the Bank of England being part of  
the recompense for their use of the Company's hall."

Together they weigh  $127\frac{1}{2}$  ozs. They are 15 inches high and  $7\frac{1}{4}$  inches in diameter. The centre of the bowls is frosted, and on each is a shield with a figure of Britannia seated, surrounded by heaps of guineas, which was the stamp in Abraham Newlands's bank notes. The date marks are for the year 1694, and the maker's mark is "I.R." with a crown above and a shell below in an oval shield, and is probably that of John Ruslen, of London. The Company gave the late Mr. F. W. Walker, on his retirement from the High Mastership of St. Paul's School, a reduced copy of one of these cups in gold. It is believed that the bases on which these cups stand were originally candlesticks, and they are detachable from the bowls of the cups by means of a screw. When used as loving cups and full of wine they are top-heavy, and care has to be taken lest the top of the cup should come off the base. The first time that my father, Sir John Watney, dined in this Hall, which was nearly 70 years ago, he was bowing across the table to an elderly portly gentleman wearing a watered silk flowered waistcoat, when the top of the cup slipped off the base, and its contents were scattered over Sir John's *vis-à-vis*. My father tells me that he took a solemn oath that he would never dine at Mercers' Hall again, but, of course, no man living has dined so many times in this Hall as my father; and the first time I dined in this Hall, when I was 17, he warned me of the dangers of this cup, and I, in my turn, warned my nephew, who is also 17, on the first occasion that he dined in this Hall last July. I hope this warning may be handed down to many generations of Sir John Watney's descendants.

TWO SILVER FLAGONS.—These are 18 inches high and 6 inches in diameter, the bases being 11 inches in diameter. They weigh 88 oz. each. The plate mark is for the year 1718, and the maker's mark "Ho" in a shield stands for Edward Holoday, of Grafton Street. The flagons bear the inscription:—

"The gift of y<sup>e</sup> Corporation of y<sup>e</sup> Mines Royall, y<sup>e</sup> Minerall  
"and Battery Works, Anno Domini 1718."

They are engraved with the arms of the Company and with two other shields of arms emblematical of the donors. In 1717 a company was projected for the insurance of ships and merchandise, and was called "The Mercers' Hall Marine Company." A pamphlet in the British Museum gives a list of the subscribers of £1,000,000 to carry on the work. The Mercers' Hall Marine Company petitioned the Crown for a Charter, but without success, and in 1718 a charter not being forthcoming the subscribers obtained possession of two Charters granted by Queen Elizabeth, one, dated 10th October, 1564, to the Governors,

Assistants and Company of the Mines Royal, giving licence to search for gold, silver, copper and quicksilver in certain counties in England, and in Wales, and the other, dated 17th September, 1565, to the Governors, Assistants and Society of the Mineral and Battery Works, giving them licence to search for mines, etc., in other parts of England, not included in the first Charter. The subscribers thereupon commenced to transact business under the name of the Court of Assistants of the Mines Royal Mineral and Battery Works. In December, 1719, they waited on King George I. with a petition for a Charter which was referred to the Privy Council, and a Charter was on 5th November, 1720, granted under the name of the Corporation of the Royal Exchange Assurance, which has carried on business in the Royal Exchange ever since, with the exception of the period required for the erection of a new exchange after the fire in 1838. The pieces of plate were given to the Company for the use of their Hall to take subscriptions.