



The Church Plate of Berks.



HE Rev. E. R. Gardner, Vicar of Fawley, read a most interesting paper on the "Church Plate of Berks" at the monthly meeting of the Berks Archæological Society, at the Abbey Gateway, Reading, on November 18th. The Rev. P. H. Ditchfield occupied the chair, and in opening the proceedings remarked that this was the first meeting held since Her Majesty the Queen had become patron of the society. Prince Christian had also consented to become a vice-patron, and among several others who had consented to become life-members were Mr. R. Benyon and Mr. W. I. Palmer. He announced that the Town Council had consented to hand over the mouldings and carvings from the Old Abbey (collected by the Rev. J. M. Guilding) to the care of the Society; and referred to the proposed testimonial to Dr. Stevens. He (the chairman) thought Dr. Stevens' valuable services should receive some acknowledgment. He then introduced the Rev. E. R. Gardner as a very great authority on the subject of church plate, who was compiling an inventory of that existing in the Western Division of the County. Mr. George Dasent had undertaken that in the eastern portion of the county, and they would all sympathize with that gentleman in having lost all his notes in the disastrous fire at Sir George's residence at Ascot.

The Rev. E. R. GARDNER said his attention was first called to the subject of old Ecclesiastical plate, the history of which formed an unwritten but very interesting chapter in many a county history, by the remarks occurring in the charge of the Bishop of Salisbury, delivered in 1885, as follows :—"I would venture to urge great care "and reverence in preserving those treasures of ancient art and "those historical monuments, whether in word, stone, metal, glass, "or parchment, which have come down to us from our forefathers. "In times of Church restoration there is always a danger lest any-

"thing that does not suit the taste of the day should be sold or even destroyed as of no account. . . . Both clergy and churchwardens must remember that they are in reality stewards, not absolute owners, and that they are stewards of the records of a Christian History as noble as that of any nation on the face of the earth." Proceeding, Mr. Gardner said those weighty words had resulted in the publication a few months ago of a complete inventory and history of the church plate in the county of Dorset, and would be followed, probably at no distant date, by a similar publication respecting Wilts.

Prominent among the "treasures of ancient art" in metal, belonging to their Parish Church, might be reckoned the vessels used in the service of Holy Communion. In many a parish there still existed those vessels which had been used for that purpose by generation after generation of the faithful. This alone should be a sufficient argument for their preservation, but further than this it was known that in some instances these vessels were manufactured from the same silver which had been used ages before the Reformation for the same sacred purpose. It was much to be regretted, however, that in many a parish the ancient vessels had disappeared from the service of the church to re-appear in the cabinets of collectors. It was well known that some silversmiths were only too willing to advise parish authorities to exchange their old cups for new, seeing that they were able to re-sell the old ones to collectors at an enormous profit. It was not only on account of the historic interest derived from its antiquity that the alienation of church plate was so much to be deprecated, but some of it was known to have been specially consecrated to the service of God. It should be remembered that church plate could not legally be sold without a faculty from the Bishop. There were cases in which, owing to the increased size of a parish, it was desirable, or even necessary, to procure new plate, but that was no reason why the old should be banished from its sacred associations.

Owing to the destruction of church goods which took place during the sixteenth century, examples of pre-Reformation art were very rare. He had had the good fortune to note three patens of undoubted pre-Reformation date, belonging respectively to Childrey, West Challow, near Wantage, and Garford, near Abingdon. The origin of such plate was sometimes as the free gift of individuals, parishioners, guilds, or corporations within a parish, and the names of the donors were often inscribed. What had become of all this

pre-Reformation plate? How was it that one hardly ever came across a piece of such plate older than the reign of Elizabeth? The tale told so often was that when Henry VIII. swept away the monasteries, some of the most valuable plunder of which he obtained possession was the store of gold and silver plate which they contained. Indirectly this greatly lessened the security of the sacred vessels belonging to Parish Churches, church officers naturally concluding that it would be their turn next. Then fears were increased by the grant of chantries to the King by Parliament in 1545. So at this period vestries were found parting with a portion of their plate, before it could be seized, and applying the proceeds to the repair of their churches. Such chantry plate as had not been already thus sold, was seized by Edward VI., when the chantries were finally dissolved in the second year of his reign. The King's injunctions in the previous year were a further cause of the disposal of plate. Ultimately, in the sixth year of that reign, as the outcome of the action of Edward's ministers, only one chalice in a small parish, and two in a large one were left. At the end of the reign all the plate that each church usually possessed was "one chalice of silver," which would include the paten, and sometimes a pyx, two candlesticks, two cruets, a cross and censor of pewter, latten (sheet brass) or other brass metal. This prevailed also as a general rule through the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth. The time then came for it to be removed by the Puritans, who thought it necessary to destroy certain "ornaments of superstition," as they were called. The order went forth that the chalice should be exchanged for a "decent Communion Cup," about 1567. An Elizabethan cup and cover represented a gift made in mediæval days; the last silver vessel left by the spoilers being sold, and almost the sum realised being spent in the purchase of the Elizabethan cup with its cover paten. Two pewter flagons and pewter basins for the offertory completed the service of the church. The earliest gift of plate made in Berks in the 17th century was, he believed, the cup and cover and flagon, given by Miss Mary Winchcombe, afterwards the Lady Mary Clarke, to the church of East Shefford. Mr. Gardner proceeded to give an interesting description of the shapes and designs of church plate during the various periods of history, and remarked that the only instance he had noted in Berks of an attempt to revive the mediæval chalice, during the 17th century, was in a cup at Chilton. He assigned the date of this cup to 1679. The design and workmanship of the 19th century had no special interest,

and not a few specimens were too light to survive the wear and tear of much use, and the determination to imitate mediæval examples must check the growth of original and artistic work. Flagon were often met with in church plate. The earliest found were of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, but these were very rare. The earliest he had noted were at Shrivenham and Ardington, dated respectively 1624 and 1633. His experience led him to believe that there was not much foreign plate in the county. A notable piece was the fine silver guilt and jewelled cup at Lockinge, bought by the late Lord Overstone, and presented to the church by Lord Wantage. He (Mr. Gardner) had some doubts as to whether the base of the cup was not of solid gold. At Shrivenham there were two solid gold plates of foreign manufacture, with fine repoussé work. Vessels of gold were of great rarity. After giving the history and details of the various hall marks for the earliest times, Mr. Gardner proceeded to give some details respecting the articles of plate in various parishes. At Wantage a fine alms dish weighing 32 oz. 10, good repoussé work, gift of Madam Willmott, of Upper Lambourn, 1725. Ardington, a flagon of 1633, one of the oldest gifts (by Robert Batten) of the 17th century. East Shefford, cup and cover, 1616, gift of Mistress Mary Winchcombe; flagon, gift of Lady Mary Clarke, 1640. Hatford, alms plate, gift of Isabel, wife of William Eales, rector, 1640. Brightwalton, foreign cup, egg-shaped bowl, and stem of elaborate workmanship. Lockinge, foreign cup, silver gift with supposed gold foot, mediæval shape and finely jewelled. Lambourne, French cup, given by Bishop Wilman when vicar; a paten, 1841, English, engraved. Woodlands, St. Mary, a beaker, probably foreign, 1628, gift of Francis Pigon, M.A., vicar of Doncaster, 1871. Also very fine alms dish (of Wantage) with repoussé work, 1661. West Shefford, a pewter tazza, peculiarly ornamented in low relief, gift of Thomas Harvy, 1621. Ashbury, pewter tazza, identical with former one much broken and defaced, but not inscribed. Catalogued in 1641, but does not appear in inventory of 1627. Chaddleworth, a cup, 1717, bearing words "Bentley Challis." Mr. Lang, rector of Bentley, near Farnham, stated that his chalice was exchanged away 1832. Lyford, a paten of plated ware, received in exchange for a silver mug within recent years. Newbury, old plate been melted down and "re-modelled" in 1867. Chilton, cup of uncommon design, about 1670. Balking, handsome two handled covered cup weighing 63 ozs. 5, nearly a foot high, incised, gift of Thomas Champion, vintner, of London, 172¾. Uffington, a cover

to a cup, 1592, maker's mark identical with that on cup at Balking, and undoubtedly belonged to that. Woolston, the only piece of silver remaining was a cover to a cup, 1851. Stanford in the Vale, a flagon, 1752, bearing a curious inscription, gift of Joseph Cox and Kath. Sophia, his wife. Eastbury, a remarkable altar cross and two brass candlesticks, about which nothing is known. Welford, cup, paten, two flagons and two alms plates, 1737, inscribed. Wickham, cover to a cup, 1804. Boxford, oldest piece of pewter noted in shape of paten, gift of James Anderton, 1672. Catmore, a paten, with modern Exeter mark.

The Rev. J. M. GUILDING proposed a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Gardner for his valuable, learned and most interesting paper. After speaking of the educational value of the paper, he said that in every age of our country, except during the prevalence of some political crisis, Englishmen and women had been characterised by a strong feeling of giving their best to God's service.—The vote was passed.—The CHAIRMAN invited those present to inspect the plate exhibited on the table. Lady Russell was unable to be present, he said, but had sent a quantity of plate from Swallowfield.

A number of ancient and beautiful specimens of plate belonging to St. Mary's and St. Lawrence's, Reading, and the parishes of Swallowfield and Barkham, also some ancient plate lent by Mr. Alfred Palmer and by Mr. J. Sydenham, of Reading, were exhibited, and were used in illustrating the lecture, together with a number of drawings.

