SOME IRISH PROVINCIAL SILVER

BY ROBERT WYSE JACKSON

THERE is a quality in the silver of our Irish makers which has always attracted me—its sense of personality. To a greater degree than most other objects of old craftsmanship, early pieces of Irish silver seem to possess an association quality.

In some cases that quality derives from the fact that our Irish markings—and particularly those of our provincial makers—are so often attributable to an individual town or to an individual maker. In other cases, our provincial silver is often enough inscribed with a reference to an incident of historical interest, or to the ownership of some particular family.

To the latter category we may attribute the very frequent heraldically engraved pieces of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Of these the National Museum tankard with the Limerick Castle and wavy star mark has the arms of Bayley of Tralee and of the Kerry family of Biennerhasset, and another tankard in the Museum which was made in 1710 by Edward Gillet of Youghal bears the arms of the family of Parker.

Or, remaining not too far from Limerick, there is the Galbally chalice of the late seventeenth century which is inscribed with the tale of the gratitude of a wife who had left Ireland during the period of the Williamite wars and who had returned to find her menfolk safe—or so we may interpret the following legend:

“This chalice was given by Elizeth Irby to ye Church of Duntryleage in ye Kingdome of Ireland as a gratefull acknowledgment to Almighty God for her safe Returne to her Native Country and finding her Husband and Father in good health; which Mercy she hopes never to forget.”

Or, going a little farther eastwards, but still in North Munster, there is the two-handled cup of Fethard Church which was given to it in 1708 by Eleanor Jolly. It is a tangible link with a story of love and of high romance.

Eleanor was a humble country girl of Fethard village. There she fell in love with a private soldier. But he was ordered abroad, and she lost touch with him. Then she went to work in London, and there, surprisingly enough, she married a very wealthy Jew who died soon afterwards leaving her a large fortune.

One day, when driving in her carriage past a London Barracks, the young widow recognised the sentry as her former sweetheart. She bought him out, they married, and returned to live in Knockelley Castle, Fethard. The castle is now in ruins—but the two-handled chalice she gave in thanksgiving for the reunion is still in use.

AND now, what of our old Irish silver which is of interest because of its local marks?
Pieces of silver plate were made in several southern centres, and hitherto unknown pieces still turn up.

Silversmiths south of Dublin worked in a good many towns, but of these only the following places have identifiable pieces: Bandon, where one piece certainly survives; Ennis, of which more later . . .; Lorrha, if “Richard Roch” who signed the 1632 Gravan-Hogan Chalice was a local man. (Buckley, Some Irish Altar Plate, R.S.A.I. p.54) (A Donegal chalice of 1633 has a similar signature—“John O’Mullarkey O’Donel’s silversmith made me.”—Buckley p.58) . . . Kinsale . . .

Youghal, had a local mark of a one-masted sailing-ship. (So had Galway, whose mark was a lynchad, a craft differently rigged from that of the southern seaport). Cork makers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used a three-master; its silversmiths were a strong association, notable among whom were the Gobles, father and son. The Cork Sterling mark persisted from about
From 1819 to 1849, "Sterling" was also used in Limerick in various forms. One Limerick-made example I noted recently is the chalice of Quin Church of Ireland, which has the word STEELING incised, with the mark noted elsewhere by Westropp, a kind of speed four-leaf cross, and also the initials I.P., which are probably those of John Purcell who died in 1815. The chalice is inscribed "Quinn Church 1915": it is eighteenth century in style and may well have been a late survivor of an earlier fashion.

Several identifiable examples exist of Kilkenny-made silver. Apart from some chalices in Kilkenny City which are unmarked, but which have in common a curious cut-card decoration suggesting a local style, there is a mark ER in a shield found in conjunction with a three-flagged castle.

A good many years ago Sir Charles Jackson (whose English Goldsmiths and their Marks was first published in 1905) noted this conjunction of marks on a chalice at Fethard, Co. Tipperary. He noticed that the design tallied with that on Kilkenny tokens of circa 1657, and he tentatively identified it as that of Edward Rebe who was said to have been a Kilkenny goldsmith between 1609 and 1304. Elsewhere I have described the chalice of Carrick-on-Suir Church of Ireland, which has identical marks and also an enlightening inscription which dates it at 1678 and says that it was the gift of the Duke of Ormond to Troop. Though the date would seem too late to make it possible that Jackson's Edward Rebe of 1609-24 could be the same maker, it is likely enough that there was a family concern which continued to use the dies or punches.

Since then I have met several other Kilkenny E.R. pieces.

Buckley describes and illustrates the "Skreen" chalice of traditional design which has the same conjunction of marks (EF). ("No date, 57," p.209). He failed to identify them as of Kilkenny.

The National Museum has on loan from Mr. K. Tacher (No. 1495/65) a tankard with identical marks. Dr. O'Sullivan dates it circa 1680. It bears arms, three bells in a circular foliate ring, perhaps those of the Porter family.

Piltown has a chalice, much smaller than that of Carrick, but almost identical in style, obviously of much the same date, and with identical (EF) marks. It is 3½ inches across the foot, 3¾ across the bowl, and 6½ inches high. It is inscribed on the foot Deo et Ecclesiae and below the foot, Dedit J. Cooke. It is interesting how marked examples of seventeenth century craftsmanship continue to come to light.

THE list of examples of Limerick silver also grows. Perhaps it should include the Ardagh chalice and the O'Dea crozier, which is inscribed Thomas O Carryd Artifex faciens. Buckley (pages 107-8) lists three County Clare chalices, that of Quin Friary, 1670, and two of Ennis Friary, 1671, which bear the maker's name, Richard Fennell. (See also Molua, 1933).

The earliest marked pieces of Limerick-made silver have been listed and their story told in this Journal by both Westropp and J. N. A. Wallace, the latter giving a theory for the conjunction of a castle (AD) and a star (C) so often found on early Limerick pieces. Church silver of unmistakably early
Limerick mark has been recorded at Enn's, Bruhenny (Buttevant) (B), Askeaton 1663, Limerick Cathedral (B), Ballintemple (Dundrum, Co. Tipperary) (J). A variant of the Limerick castle mark, a comb-like formalisation (H), has been recorded by me at Dunkerrin (1898) and by Archdeacon Seymour at New Inn, Co. Tipperary (1712). A further hitherto unrecorded Limerick piece is the Kilmaina chalice, now in Killaloe Cathedral. It is a small chalice, of bowl, knop and foot, uninscribed but probably of the late seventeenth century. It has town marks identical with those on the paten of St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick (A.B.), i.e. a castle in a shield, and a partly obliterated I.B. with two five-pointed stars (Jonathan Buck).

REFERENCES