

VIII.

NOTICE OF A FINELY ORNAMENTED CHALICE OF SILVER, PARCEL-GILT, THE PROPERTY OF R. B. Æ. MACLEOD, Esq. OF CADBOLL. BY NORMAN MACPHERSON, LL.D., SHERIFF OF GALLOWAY, VICE-PRESIDENT.

It is to be regretted that so little is known respecting this cup or chalice (Fig. 1.), remarkable no less for the grace of its form than for that of the twelve engraved panels on its bowl.



Fig. 1. Chalice of Silver, the property of R. B. Æ. Macleod, Esq., of Cadboll.

It was exhibited in Edinburgh at the International Exhibition of 1886, by R. B. Æ. Macleod, Esq., of Cadboll, in Ross-shire, who has

allowed it also to be exhibited here, and to be reproduced in electrotype for the Museum.

All he could tell of its history was that when Invergordon Castle was burned, less than a century ago, this cup and another (both silver, parcel-gilt) were saved, and that family tradition said that one or both were spoil from a ship of the Spanish Armada, wrecked on the island of Lewis, and thus came into the hands of the chief of the Lewis branch of Macleods from whom the Macleods of Cadboll are descended.

On one of the cups, which is of a well-known English type, and bears an English hall-mark, there is the inscription "1588, MACLEOD OF LEWS," in letters and figures of a style apparently much later than that date. This suggests that the tradition was associated with that particular cup, and that the date was put on it in order to preserve the tradition, but its hall-mark makes it most unlikely that it could have been found in a Spanish ship.

The other cup (that which has been reproduced, and which is here illustrated) may possibly be of foreign origin. It has no hall-mark.

In the end of the sixteenth century it was not uncommon to find foreign plate without hall-marks, and the same want was common in Scotland, although it was contrary to Act of Parliament to omit them. As the cup has been repaired, the original stalk or base may have borne a hall-mark which has been lost.

My first desire was to compare this cup with other Celtic plate, but the result of inquiry with regard to a good many Highland families, is, that I am led to believe that, unless in the case of the Dunvegan cups and one or two others, no pre-Reformation plate survives, and whoever has read Highland history must know that neither the footing on which the chiefs lived with each other, nor their relations with the Government, were favourable to the preservation of plate, and that the probability is that all was either plundered or melted down.

Had the Lyon King's jurisdiction been more deferred to than that of the Crown was, the shield engraved in the centre of the cup (fig. 2) might have had something to reveal as to its age, as well as the letters M and N on either side of it.

The engraving of the shield is as inferior to that of the ring within

which it is found as it is to that of the rest of the cup, and is evidently more modern; and the charges correspond with those of no known shield.

Beyond all doubt, Highlanders were in the habit of assuming, quartering, and impaling arms at their own pleasure, and with little reference to the Lyon King or the rules of Heraldry. Therefore it is somewhat rash to build on inferences to be drawn from the shield. Castles, lymphads, and lions are too appropriate to West Highland life to suggest much; Macleods, Macdonalds, and Macleans all at some time have borne them on their escutcheons. But here we have one charge not to be seen on any West Highland shield, probably not on any Scottish shield, except



Fig. 2. Shield Engraved in the Bottom of the Cup.



Fig. 3. Shield of Maclean, from the MS. of Sir David Lindsay.

that of Maclean, namely, the two eagles' heads erased affrontée of the third quarter.

On the earliest known painted shield of Dowart, viz., that given in Mr Stodart's work, and taken from the armorial MS. of Sir David Lindsay the younger (fig. 3), the castle occupies the first quarter.¹

¹ This unofficial MS. Roll is dated 1601-3. A few years before that date, Maclean of Dowart was brought to Edinburgh on the charges of destroying wholesale the inhabitants of Eigg, Rum, and Canna, and (in the eyes of the Government) the still more unpardonable offence of blowing up the Spanish ship "Florida" at Tobermory. To avoid trial, he submitted himself to the pleasure of the king. Can it be that, while in durance in the castle awaiting the declaration of that pleasure, he felt so confident of the result that he amused himself matriculating his arms?

The present shield of Maclean of Dowart has neither castle nor lion. For the former a rock has been substituted, and for the latter a hand holding a cross crosslet fitchée. On several Iona tombs, said to be those of Macleans of Dowart, the hero's shields have a dragon, and on one there appears a castle such as that engraved on the cup; while on a tomb called, on what authority I know not, Maclean of Ross, a lion is found instead of the dragon.¹

We thus find that all the charges of the shield on the cup might have appeared on a Maclean shield in the end of the sixteenth century.

Have we anything to connect the shield with the Macleods in whose possession the cup is found?

The Cadboll arms have been several times matriculated of recent years; they now contain neither castle nor lion. The castle was the characteristic of the Dunvegan Macleods, as a burning mountain was of those of Lewis, but a galley is found on the Macleod tomb at Iona; and certainly, whatever their authority, the Macleods of the Lewis branch have sometimes carried a lion, and the Cadboll matriculated shield of 1784 shows a castle. Thus we have on the shield in the cup three charges that might equally represent either Macleans or Macleods. Either family, therefore, wishing to record an occasion in which both had a common interest, might have had this shield engraved. Such an occasion might be found either in a raid by the one clan, the result of which was that the house of the other was plundered, or when a hollow peace was to be soldered up by a marriage.

Such a marriage occurred shortly before the arrival of the Spanish Armada, when Ruari Macleod of Lews married a daughter of Lachlan Maclean of Dowart, who blew up the "Florida." There were also, it is believed, marriages between Macleans and the Macleods of Assynt, who were often, as were some of those of Lewis, known by the great family name of Niel or Nielson. Is this the meaning of the letter N? and is this lion meant for the impaling of the Macleod shield, the letter M standing for Maclean? The eagles' heads demonstrate that a Maclean must have been undoubtedly connected in some way with the cup.

¹ Both Maclean of Lochbuy and Maclean of Ardgour now carry both lion and castle.

The conclusion come to is, that the shield does not exclude the possibility of the cup having come into the hands of Macleod as early as the time of the Armada.

That, however, tells us very little, and leaves open what is really the question of interest, whether the ornament on the cup can speak more definitely.

The ornamentation is unlike that on any old British cup known to me, and still less resembles any Spanish plate exhibited in this country or figured in works treating of silver plate.

The bowl, the handle, and the base of this cup seem to be of different dates and character. Round the base is a circle $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch broad-stamped continuously (not engraved) with a simple well-known Celtic pattern. It is interesting to observe that the Losset brooch or reliquary, of which also a reproduction has been recently acquired by the Society, has a surrounding base of similarly stamped repetitions of the same Celtic device on a somewhat larger scale. The use of such stamped patterns was very common among Scotch silversmiths.

The stalk of the cup is of a form resembling that of many communion cups of the post-Reformation period. It is ornamented with an engraved pattern, which seems to be of Renaissance type, and yet is not so unlike some of the patterns on the bowl as to be pronounced with certainty the work of a different hand.

The bowl is hammered and formed with great accuracy. The panels, too, are set off with care, but are not absolutely identical in size. It is in the engraved ornament of these panels that the great interest of this cup centres. Taken as a whole, they render the cup unique; yet each detail of ornament may almost be said to be common to the whole world. For instance, four of the panels and part of a fifth show interlacing ribbon patterns, with pegs or rivets. The remainder show forms familiar in Byzantine art, and such as we see in France in the twelfth century, in the Highlands down to the Reformation, and certainly not unknown in England in the time of Queen Elizabeth.

Still probably the ornamentation may give aid in determining the age of the cup. It may be affirmed with some confidence, that at no period within the two hundred years, from the time of the Armada to that of

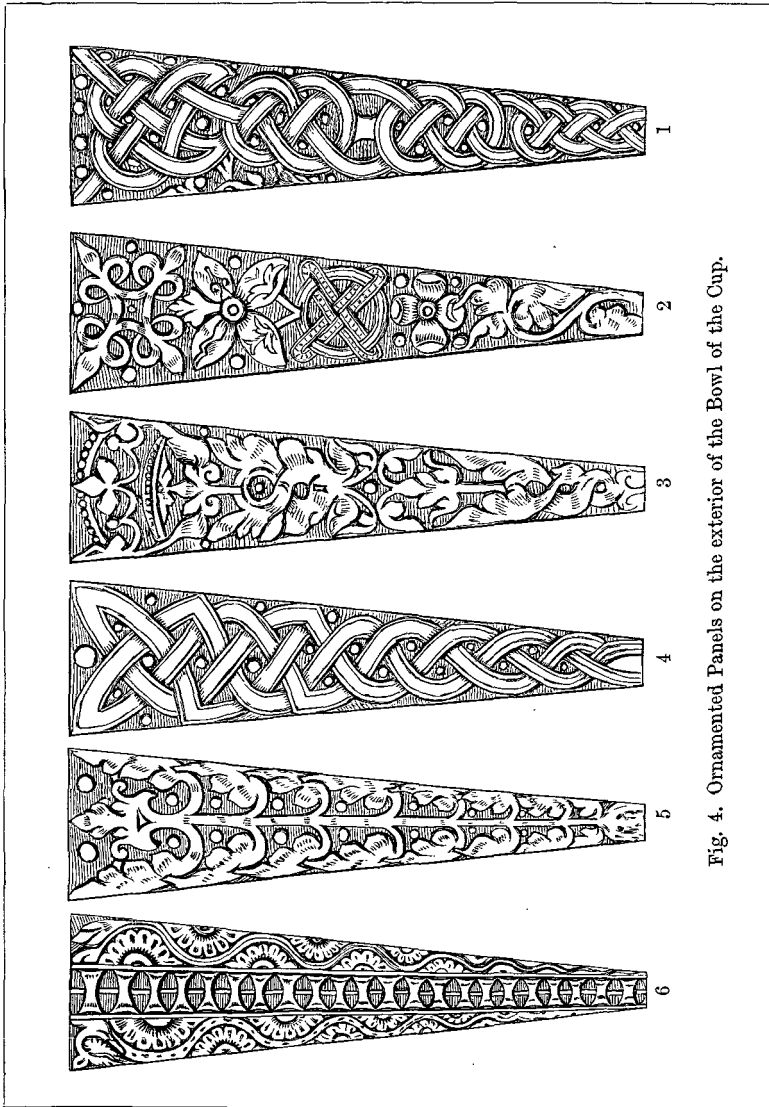


Fig. 4. Ornamented Panels on the exterior of the Bowl of the Cup.

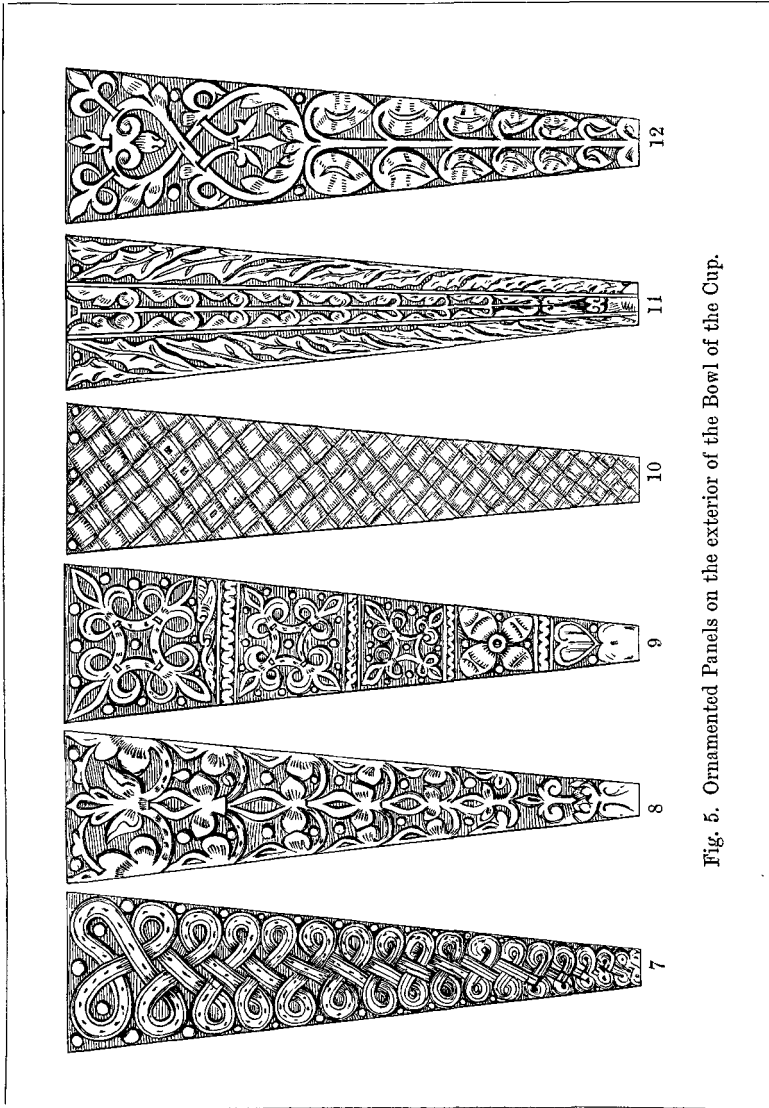


Fig. 5. Ornamented Panels on the exterior of the Bowl of the Cup.

the burning of Invergordon Castle, was the state of art or of taste such that we should expect such ornaments to be engraved on silver plate.

No doubt, any time since the commencement of the Celtic furor, half a century ago, one familiar with Celtic ornament in its various stages prior to the Reformation, might have devised similar patterns, but, so far as we have been able to observe, no one ever did.

I find nothing that certainly fixes its date. As has been said, probably each of the different patterns on the twelve panels may be found somewhere else; but probably nowhere except in the West Highlands could they all be found in use at the same date; and the more one looks at them collectively, the stronger does the impression become that they are all pervaded by an Iona tone and feeling, and are probably the work of the sixteenth century, by some one thoroughly familiar with the sculptured stones of the west, and specially of Argyleshire.

But whoever executed or directed the execution of the engraving did not slavishly copy a West Highland model. Any one used to designing Celtic tombstones may well have given instructions for the style of ornament adopted, or a stranger artist, struck with the style of the sculptured stones, may have endeavoured to adapt it to a different kind of work. If the interlacing patterns were engraved by the hand of an experienced Celtic artist, the interlacing has in no case been correctly carried out, as some of the straps either drop out of sight, or are run into others; but this may be explained perhaps by the want of room caused by the tapering of the panels.

Tombstones were often divided into compartments ornamented with figures partly geometric and partly floriated. Here we find several panels containing more than one pattern; from the smallness of the panels and their tapering shape many of the details are omitted. The workmen have not had exact models prepared for their work, and so the patterns have not always been correctly placed in the spaces allotted, and in two cases (Nos. 4 and 9) one of an interlacing pattern and one where several patterns are in one panel, vacant spaces have been left so large that another hand has inserted some work, evidently to take off the effect of the resulting bareness. In those panels where the ornament consists mainly of floriation, two specialties are to be observed;—first, that the leaf

adopted is not the small three-pointed leaf so common on the older stones, but the large leaf with few indentations ; and secondly, that whereas in the West Highland stones a series of leaves is rarely found all on one side of a stalk, and very rarely branch off on both sides at the same point, but are generally set alternately on different sides of a waving stalk, here, except at the bottom of one panel (No. 2), and in the ring surrounding the coat of arms, the waving line with alternating leaves never appears. The leaf adopted for the engraving is found generally on stones of a late date.

Panels No. 6 and 11 are the most peculiar, and the most suggestive of a late date.

In the middle of the one panel where leaves appear on alternate sides of the stalk, it will be observed that an interlacing pattern has been introduced. It is interesting to note the same thing occur in a carved panel of a wooden pulpit in the Museum, the date of which is 1594.

Any one wishing to compare the work on the cup with that on the sculptured stones, has only to turn to the works of Dr Stuart and Mr Drummond. The following plates are suggested for comparison :—in Stuart, vol. ii. plates xxiv. and xxv., and in Drummond, 12, 19, 31, 35, 65, 85, and 86.

It would not be right, in considering who may possibly have been the artist of this cup, to ignore the Highland ceard—a name now nearly equivalent to the “tinker” in the Lowlands. The degradation of the functions of the ceard is such that it is now as great a reproach among artificers to be called simply “ceard” as it used to be among the fighting men of the clan. But the prefixing of the word “Fear” (man) to ceard or ceird—some hold these different words—at once elevates the person addressed to a higher platform as a man of art. Of old, indeed, the ceard was the artist of highest quality, both in Ireland and in Scotland, and to him we owe the Tara brooch and other beautiful Irish work, and also our recently acquired Cadboll brooch, as well as our Celtic croziers and reliquaries and bells—aye, and bell-cases too. The ceards worked in gold, silver, copper, and bronze, and were contrasted with the Gow who wrought in iron. It were hard to say that some of the successors of those early artists had

not in the sixteenth century eyes and hands equal to the task of designing or engraving this cup. Down to a very recent date, they showed considerable invention in making and engraving brooches, and I am assured that the hand of the ceard of the Outer Hebrides has not yet quite lost its cunning, but can still do simple work in silver.

The mere bowl of the ante-Reformation chalice was often entirely without ornament,—however richly set round some were with finials and filagree work. May not some such bowl have come into the possession of a chief as plunder, and been given to a ceard to ornament ?