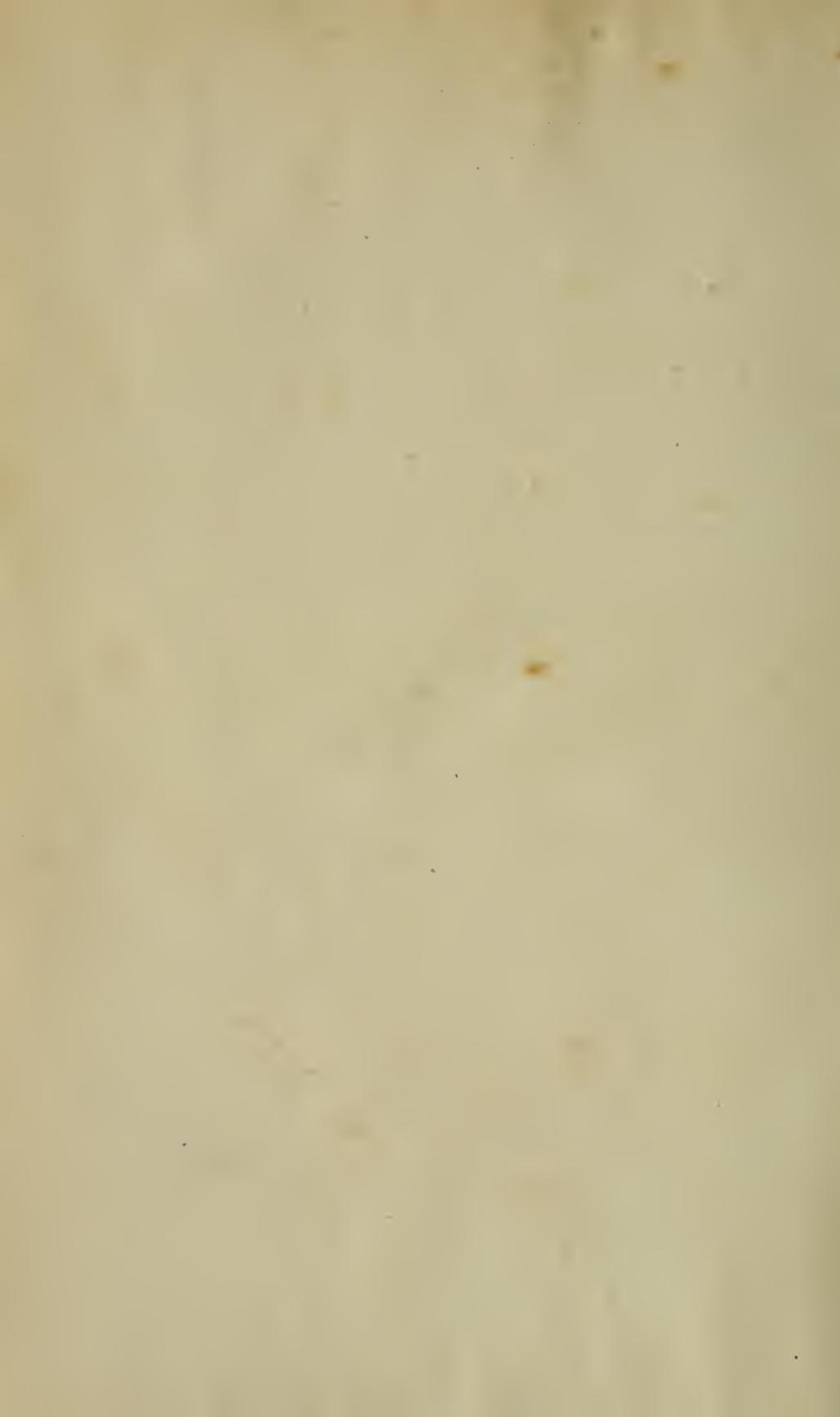


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A LETTER

TO

THE VENERABLE PHILIP FREEMAN, M.A.

ARCHDEACON AND CANON OF EXETER,

ON

Certain Statements respecting

WEEKLY COMMUNION,

IN HIS

RECENT TREATISE ENTITLED "RITES AND RITUAL."

WITH AN APPENDIX.

BY

ROBERT HENRY FORTESCUE, M.A.

RECTOR OF STOCKLEIGH POMEROY, DEVON.

From contempt of Thy Word and Commandment,
Good Lord, deliver us.

SECOND EDITION.

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ADVERTISEMENT TO THE SECOND EDITION.

SINCE the following Letter was published, I have received a communication from the Bishop of Exeter, through his Chaplain, informing me that my inference from the external appearance and other accidents of the Archdeacon's pamphlet—that it had received his lordship's approval, and was issued at his desire—is erroneous. Thankful as I am to receive this assurance, I cannot wonder that I drew the inference alluded to. In the *Guardian* of February 7th, the pamphlet was advertised as forthcoming, "with an Introduction by the Lord Bishop of Exeter." I assumed, of course, that that announcement was not made without a distinct promise from his lordship to the effect stated; and I thought that such aid would imply approval. When the pamphlet appeared, however, the promised Introduction was not contained in it; but the Archdeacon stated, in a Preface, that, "although his hope had been in part frustrated, he had still been privileged to embody, in an Appendix, his lordship's deliberate judgment on some of the weightier matters of Eucharistic Doctrine, and to receive an assurance of his warm interest in the subjects dwelt upon in these [the Archdeacon's] pages."

Besides these indications of the Bishop's concurrence, I could not but remark that the pamphlet was published, not by Mr. Parker, from whose press the

“Principles of Divine Service” issued, but by the Bishop’s publisher, Mr. Murray. Moreover, the last two pages of its cover were devoted to advertisements of the Bishop’s works, and of his only; his lordship’s name was conspicuous on the title-page; and the whole appearance of the pamphlet was such that, familiar as I am with the Bishop’s writings, I at first fully believed it to be from his pen. On finding myself mistaken in this, I could not resist the impression that, at least, these circumstances were intended to intimate to us his lordship’s approval and recommendation of the Archdeacon’s treatise. And I gave expression to that feeling in my letter.

Being now convinced that I was in error on this point, I feel bound to say that I deeply regret having, upon *any* grounds, conceived an impression, the publication of which has (I fear) pained the heart of my venerable Diocesan. His lordship now assures me that the only passages in the Archdeacon’s pamphlet known to him before its publication were those contained in Appendix A (his lordship’s opinions on certain points of doctrine), and in Appendix B,—a judgment delivered by him many years since as to legality of Vestments; whilst, as to the pamphlet itself, his lordship neither gave it the sanction of his “*imprimatur*,” nor any recommendation; nor had he seen its contents before its publication. Many of the Clergy, besides myself, will rejoice to know this.

R. H. F.

Stockleigh, June 27th, 1866.



A

LETTER,

ſc.

MY DEAR MR. ARCHDEACON,—

In reading lately your pamphlet on “Rites and Ritual,” I have felt aggrieved and extremely astonished at certain statements which you have made on the subject of Weekly Communion. You speak of it as a matter of “Divine obligation¹,” as one of “the essentials of the mysterious Ordinance²,” as “alone fulfilling the commandment of Christ³.” You censure what you term “the *guilt* of the evil custom⁴” of less frequent celebration, as being scarcely less culpable than the denial of the cup to the laity⁵; and you roundly charge more than eleven thousand English parishes with being on this account, if “judged by the rule of the Apostles, false to their Lord’s dying command in a particular from which He left no dispensation⁶.”

Beyond all question these words convey a very heavy charge against a large majority of the clergy; and since it applies, among others, to myself, I feel

¹ P. 29.

² P. 12.

³ P. 34.

⁴ P. 25.

⁵ P. 12.

⁶ P. 13.

that I need offer no apology for adopting this mode of addressing to you, although my ecclesiastical superior, a few words of earnest expostulation. By a sort of euphemism, indeed, you describe the words which I have cited, as being only “strong language of deprecation”⁷; but I think it would be difficult to conceive expressions of more severe (I had almost said, of more offensive) condemnation. And your censure is not the less weighty on account of the form in which it has been promulgated. Although it is not so expressly stated, your pamphlet has all the external appearance of having been written and issued, not merely with the approval, but at the express desire of our diocesan. On first seeing it in a friend’s house, the thought at once occurred to me that our venerable Bishop had added yet another to his many previous charges and pastorals; and when my friend had undeceived me on this point, it still seemed as if his lordship desired that your book should be regarded as his, and that it should be accepted by us, his clergy, as the designed substitute for his usual triennial admonition. Issued by the Bishop’s publisher, with his lordship’s publications thickly advertised upon its cover, and his lordship’s name more prominent than your own upon its title-page, all this would have justified the belief that it had received the Bishop’s *imprimatur*, even if he had neither engaged to preface it with an Introduction, nor authorized you to cite his opinions in its Appendix.

Now it will scarcely be disputed that under no circumstances should a charge so grave in its substance and unmeasured in its terms as that which I have cited, be advanced except with most assured and sufficient proofs of its truth and justice. Least of all, if a particle of doubt attaches to it, should the credit of

one in high place and authority, and bowed down with the weight of extreme old age, be committed to it, except with his full and conscious concurrence. Yet, not only is the charge (as I believe) utterly unjust and incapable of proper proof, not only do you appear to me to have failed to support it except by a series of bare assertions, assumed facts, assumed analogies, and unsound reasoning; but it is palpably inconsistent with advice given to us by the same Bishop many years ago, when his learning, judgment, and critical acumen were at their best, and he addressed us in the full vigour of his capacious intellect.

In objecting, however, to the charge which you have thought it your duty to bring against those clergymen who do not hold a weekly celebration of the Eucharist, I would by no means be understood to deny the benefit of frequent communion, or the desirableness of encouraging it, *provided that it be reverently and worthily approached*. I only dispute the fact of such frequency, or indeed of *any* regulation as to the periods of celebration, forming part of the Divine command with respect to it; and I consequently dispute also the justice of your charging those who practically do not agree with you, with being false to the command of their dying Lord.

The arguments by which you attempt to prove the Divine obligation of weekly communion are mainly of two kinds:—1. Inferences from the alleged general or universal practice of the early Church; 2. Inferences from certain rites and customs which you assert or assume to have prevailed among the Jews at our Saviour's time, and which you assume to be analogous to the Blessed Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In all the cases last referred to, you assume the fact of an analogy having been intended; and in some particular respects you assume also the facts which are

required to constitute the analogy. You do not pretend the authority of the divinely inspired Word for your positions. On the contrary, you admit that Holy Scripture is brief and unsystematic (you might have said, altogether silent) on the subject. And you might have added that, although our Blessed Lord was most precise and explicit as to the particulars which we have been hitherto taught to regard as the "essential features" of the Sacrament, He has not left on record one word prescribing the degree of frequency with which He would have it celebrated. That this silence is not the result of any omission on the part of the Evangelists, is evident from the practice of Christians soon after our Lord's ascension. For, if it had pleased Him distinctly to command, or to intimate in any way which they could not misunderstand, that communion should be weekly, we may be quite sure that none of them would at once have so far disregarded His will as to partake of the Holy Sacrament (as many did partake of it) every day.

I. As to the practice of the primitive Church, there need be no dispute. Although we have not the means of proving—what nevertheless you assume as proved—that "there was *no Church throughout the world* which failed to have a weekly celebration on the Sunday," yet it may be admitted, that, so far as the practice of the various Churches is known to us, frequent communion was universal. More, perhaps, may be said for daily than for weekly celebration⁹; but it cannot be doubted that the Holy Eucharist formed a most important part of the public worship of Christians on the Lord's Day, and that those who failed to attend and partake of it were considered lukewarm, and as times

⁸ P. 11.

⁹ See Johnson, vol. ii. p. 185; Beveridge, vol. x. p. 188. Edd. A. C. Library, Oxford, 1847.

went on (you say, about the beginning of the fourth century) were placed under censure. But all this proves nothing as to the *Divine obligation* of a weekly celebration. All that has been admitted might have taken place—might have been so “by universal consent and practice,” yet have been so only as one of those matters of ecclesiastical order and arrangement, which each “particular or national Church hath authority to ordain or change” for itself¹. Unless therefore you are prepared to maintain as the major premiss of your argument—what, nevertheless, few theologians would concede to you—that every custom which universally prevailed in the early Church was of Divine obligation, you have as yet made but small progress towards the conclusion on which you have based your most tremendous accusation. As yet, neither in this nor in your larger work, have you cited a single authority in proof of your assertions, that weekly celebration is an essential feature of the Sacrament, and part of our Lord’s command.

II. The insufficiency of this argument from the practice of the early Church, appears to have forced itself upon your own mind; for you anticipate objections to it, and endeavour to fortify it by certain analogies, or assumptions of analogy, between parts of the Old and New Covenants.

There is, of course, *in limine*, a general objection to the use of the argument from analogy at all in this case. An argument of that kind may serve as an answer—and, as used by Bishop Butler, it is a very effective one—to such objections (for instance) as are urged against religion, on the ground of certain difficulties in it, by those who deny revelation, but admit

¹ Art. XXXIV. The rule of St. Vincent of Lerins, “*Quod semper, quod ubique,*” &c., however true and valuable in respect of points of faith, does not apply to matters of discipline and ritual.

the existence of a Supreme Being as the Author of nature. If it can be shown that in the constitution of nature, the Divine authorship of which is admitted, similar difficulties present themselves, those difficulties no longer furnish a valid objection to the Divine origin of revelation. Rather, if there be positive evidence in its favour, they now tend to corroborate such positive evidence: because, if both nature and revelation proceed from the same Author, it was only to be expected that they would present similar difficulties as their characteristics. In like manner, if our Lord had indubitably commanded a weekly celebration of the Eucharist, and any one, admitting the Divine origin of the Old Testament, objected to the Sacrament on the ground of such frequency, he would be sufficiently answered by being reminded that a precisely similar frequency had been appointed for certain rites under the Old Covenant. But such an argument is no substitute whatever for *positive evidence of the fact*. The presumption from analogy that it was, *a priori*, not unlikely that our Divine Saviour would, in some matter in itself indifferent, take this or that course, affords no certain proof that He *has* taken it. It might be argued as probable from analogy that the Eucharist would be annual, or thrice a year, or weekly, or daily; but a hundred such presumptions, as they fall to the ground before six words of positive command, so in the absence of such command they settle nothing.

But let us turn to your particulars.

The first analogous instance which you produce, is "the mysterious ordinance of the week. Creation, Redemption, Sanctification (you say) were all visibly based upon the week." That is, the world was created in a week; a week elapsed between Palm Sunday (which you arbitrarily take as the beginning of the consummation of our Redemption) and Easter

Day; and again, (oh, wonderful elasticity of “principles!”) not a week, but “seven weeks, or a week of weeks,” elapsed between Easter Day and the sending down of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, “for the completion of the Church.” Hence you conclude it to be “highly probable”—you prudently admit that “it cannot be alleged as an absolute *proof*”—“that the celebration of the Eucharist was also meant to be of weekly recurrence.” I pause to draw breath after following you in this most marvellous flight of an ingenious fancy; for I feel that answer it requires none. I will only express my amazement that such an argument should have been produced at all, when its object was the very serious one of fastening upon brethren the charge of being false to the command of their dying Saviour.

I pass on to what you term “more positive and distinct intimations of the will of God over and above” the preceding “general presumptions.” You say, “It is always a somewhat delicate task” (might you not have said—*presumptuous and impossible*, except under the guidance of Divine inspiration?) “to gather from the provisions of the Old Law sure and certain conclusions as to the destined ones of the New;” and therefore you admit that “we cannot assume with certainty that the seventh-day recurrence of any feast of the Old Law, however close its resemblance to the Eucharist in other respects, enforces of necessity a like seventh-day recurrence of the Christian ordinance.” Still, having in your mind a foregone conclusion as to the Divine obligation of a weekly Eucharist, you proceed to search in the ceremonies of the Old Law for something that can be made to correspond with that conclusion.

Now I had been wont to imagine that, of the Levitical sacrifices, the Passover was that which was

generally accepted as most parallel to the Eucharist². The unblemished character of the victim, the prophetic command that not a bone of it should be broken, the time of the year at which our Lord suffered, as well as the express words of St. John the Baptist and of St. Paul, all point to Jesus as the antitype, the fulfilment of the Passover. And, as that feast of the Jewish Church looked forward, so has it been commonly believed that the Christian Eucharist looks backward to the same great propitiation. The disputes among the early Christians as to the duty of celebrating with unleavened bread, prove that they were at least not insensible to the correspondence; whilst the adoption of the Easter Anthem ("Christ our Passover," &c.), and the description of our Lord in the proper preface for Easter Day, as "the very Paschal Lamb which was offered for us," include this Church of England in the number of those who accept this interpretation. Strange to say, however, in your enumeration of Jewish rites and ceremonies which may have foreshadowed the Eucharist, that of the Passover finds no place. It is not so much as named. Are we to account for this omission by the reflection that, as the Passover required only yearly instead of weekly celebration and participation, it rather militated against the exigencies of your argument?

The peace-offerings again, which I had imagined that you accepted as of all the Jewish rites the most analogous to the Eucharist³, you pass lightly over in

² Dr. Mede identifies the Eucharist with the *Mincha*, or meat-and-drink-offering, of the Passover. Works, B. iv., Ep. 58, sect. 4. See also Dr. Hammond on the New Testament, 1 Cor. x., note *e*.

³ In the "Principles of Divine Service" the peace-offering is actually indexed as "the proper analogue of the Eucharist." Vol. ii., Part ii., p. 491.

some five lines, as if you felt that their being offered and partaken of, as an absolute rule, only three times in the year, rendered them especially inconvenient to a controversialist bent on proving that neglect of weekly communion is a deadly sin.

And as the last-mentioned rites were inadequate to your purpose by reason of their infrequency, so the daily sacrifices, which many have regarded as indicating the propriety of daily Eucharists⁴, appear to have proved too frequent for you; for they also are dismissed in a few lines. The shewbread is the first ordinance which satisfies your requirements. In this case, you say, “the analogy is perfect;” although you offer no single proof that any analogy was intended. But it was offered weekly; it was all eaten [none of it, however, by laics]; and to it, you assure us, we may most safely refer the prophecy of Malachi as to “a pure offering,” although no proof is adduced that Malachi’s prediction had any such reference at all.

It is true that this comparison of the Holy Eucharist with the shewbread offers one or two points of difficulty; but they are easily surmounted. The shewbread was to be eaten “weekly, neither more nor less;” but it could not be denied—for the practice of the whole Church, ancient and modern, primitive and mediæval, Roman and Anglican, would have witnessed against the denial—that the Eucharist might be celebrated *more* frequently than once a week; even daily, if the devotion of Christians justified it. Accordingly, it is at once *assumed*, without a particle of proof, that the “weekly celebration and communion of the shewbread “certifies to us (!), on the principle above laid down⁵, that the Christian Eucha-

⁴ Johnson, ii. 188.

⁵ The principle here referred to would seem to be one laid down

rist, its very counterpart and continuation, was to be weekly as a *minimum*." And as it might possibly occur to some reader of dull common sense that such differences are fatal to any analogy in that particular for which alone it was brought forward, it is forthwith *asserted* that "the same analogy would suggest, what we know to have been the case from very early times, that the Christian rite was not, like the Jewish, to be *limited* to a weekly performance." So that, if this be correct reasoning, one and the same analogy may be made use of, first to enforce agreement, then to justify departures from itself. Can this be a fair specimen of the way in which theology is taught in the latter half of the nineteenth century?

The other point in which the shewbread fails of a satisfactory correspondence with the Eucharist, is *the absence of wine* from the former ceremony. This difficulty, again, is easily removed. It is simply *asserted* that "the materials of it were bread and wine." I must own to having at first read this statement with a feeling of astonishment, for it was altogether new to me. No references were given for its confirmation. I searched my Bible and Concordance, as well as various other books, in vain for explanation. At length it occurred to me, that in your preface you had referred us to your larger work for "detailed proof" of points only cursorily treated of in this. On turning, therefore, to the "Principles of Divine Service," I soon found, by the help of the

on the preceding page (p. 18), "As a law pervading the transference of the old ways of service to the new system, that there was to be no going back or falling short in this point of frequency, but an equality at the lowest, and even some advance in that respect." As if principles might be made, as required, to fit the cases which are to be tried by them! They are then called, not "Principles," but "*Petitiones principiorum*."

Index, at Vol. II. part ii. page 185, the following statement: "The shewbread, accompanied by its salt and frankincense (*tradition says* by wine also), was set in order," &c. There is a reference to the foot of the page; but there, instead of citations from ecclesiastical writers in proof of the existence of such a tradition, I found the following note, which I transcribe in full, as an instance of the kind of satisfaction which your readers may expect to meet with, if they refer to your "larger work."

"The *Scriptural* grounds for supposing the wine are, 1. The analogy of all other meat-offerings, Num. xv. 5. 2. The 'bowls⁶ to pour out withal,' Exod. xxv. 29, marg., LXX. 3. The obscure words of Zech. ix. 15, 'they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar;' for there was no wine to be *drunk* at the altar of burnt-offering: whereas the analogy of the shewbread would require the wine to be in part or wholly kept for drinking. It is probable that drinking this wine led to the fault of Nadab and Abihu, Lev. x. 1—9, and that the wine ever after was either poured out or drunk elsewhere. The Gentile custom of pouring wine between the horns of the victim, combined with Zech. ix., makes it probable that the shewbread wine was poured between the horns (Exod. xxx. 3) of the altar of incense."

Thus all the "detailed proof" which you produce for this assumption (so vitally important to your argument), that wine formed part of the shewbread offering, is the unsupported assertion that "tradition says" so,

⁶ The expression of the LXX, τοὺς κιάθους, ἐν οἷς σπείσεις ἐν αὐτοῖς, would seem to imply that these "bowls" were used for libations. If so, although kept on the shewbread table, they would be *used* at the altar of burnt-offerings, where, of course, they could not be kept.—R. H. F.

and these “Scriptural grounds,”—for which (pardon my freedom) *guesses* would have been a fitter name⁷.

Before leaving this matter, I will venture to suggest to your consideration a few grounds for *strongly presuming* that wine did *not* accompany the shewbread.

1. The entire silence of Holy Scripture respecting what (if it existed) constituted one whole moiety of an important offering.
2. The absence of all mention of wine in such extremely minute enumerations of the furniture of the shewbread table as we have in Exod. xxv., and 2 Chron. iv.
3. The absence of all provision for its safe carriage, “when the camp set forward;” although the carriage of “candlestick, and lamps, and tongs, and snuff-dishes, and *oil-vessels*” is provided for. See Num. iv. 7—10.
4. The almost certainty that David, when he received the shewbread, would have demanded the wine also, if any necessarily accompanied it.

When we consider the serious nature of your charge

⁷ At this point it may not be amiss to review the series of assumptions, by means of which the shewbread is made to serve as an argument for weekly communion.

1. That the two rites *are* analogous to one another.
2. That wine formed a part of the shewbread-offering.
3. That an exact analogy must exist between the shewbread and all other meat-offerings, so that, if wine was used in the latter, it must also have been in the former.
4. That when we come to the *consumption* of the wine, this last-mentioned analogy must be abandoned; because the analogy of the shewbread itself requires that, as the bread was eaten, so the wine should be drunk.
5. That the sin of Nadab and Abihu in offering strange fire, “probably” arose from intemperance occasioned by their drinking the shewbread wine. [To give this assumption a show of probability, verses 8 and 9 are included in the reference, although the narrative ends at verse 7.]
6. That ever after the wine was “probably” either poured out, or drunk elsewhere! Is it indeed true, that (as I have been credibly informed) the study of the Archdeacon’s book is recommended to newly-ordained deacons in this diocese, and some acquaintance with it expected from them before they are admitted to Priests’ Orders?

against us, and the confident tone in which it is urged, we might reasonably have expected that, if it were capable of satisfactory proof, the arguments already examined would have sufficed for that purpose. But, notwithstanding the confidence of your tone, you appear still to have entertained misgivings as to their conclusiveness. For, as if suddenly recollecting that as yet you had adduced no shred of evidence which could bring home to our Blessed Lord Himself the appointment of a weekly celebration, you proceed (though rather late) to point out in the words of institution, "one, though but one," which you think may have been spoken with that intention. The word is *ὄσάκις*, *as often as*. "Do this, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." To most readers the natural inference from this expression would be, that it placed beyond doubt the notion that our Lord *abstained* from prescribing any special times or any definite rate of frequency, for partaking of the sacrament of His Death; but it occurs to you to inquire whether, when He used this word, He may not have had in His mind some Jewish custom of drinking wine in solemn religious memorial, the frequency of which would decide the frequency with which the newly-instituted ordinance was to be observed. You admit your inability to prove that they had any such custom at our Saviour's time, but you tell us that they have such a custom *now*,—a custom "of offering and consecrating, at the synagogue service, *on the eve of every Sabbath*, a cup of wine, which was then drunk of," &c. You further tell us that they have "yet another Sabbath-eve rite, nearly akin to this one, only that it was a domestic rite, and performed at supper, and with bread as well as wine," &c.; in short, precisely what your argument was crying for. And you think it "infinitely probable" that as these rites exist now, they existed at our Saviour's time;

you think it “inconceivable but that they must have existed.” And having thus apparently, by increasing strength of words, convinced yourself that a point so exactly suited to the exigency of your argument was indubitable, you proceed thus:—“Let it be supposed, then, and it seems to be incontestable, *if* the existence of the rites at that time may be safely assumed, that to these rites our Lord alluded in the words, ‘as oft as ye drink.’ We, then, have from Himself a plain intimation [!] as to the frequency of Eucharistic celebration.” But what a place is that for an “if!” Your whole argument depends upon it. If you could only prove that those rites existed in our Saviour’s time, and if you could prove further that one or the other of them was in His Mind when He was instituting the Holy Sacrament, you might reasonably contend that, in using the words “as oft as,” He intended to prescribe a very definite rate of frequency for its celebration. But it is impossible for you to prove so much. And consequently the expression on which you rely, so far from conveying “a plain intimation” of our Lord’s will on this subject, conveys no definite intimation at all upon it; and this argument, like your former ones, sinks to the low (and in theology most unsatisfactory) level of conjecture and assumption.

It is, of course, no part of my object, nor am I called on, to prove the negative of what you have maintained; but there is one remark which I feel impelled to make with regard to all those arguments which you have drawn from a supposed analogy between the Eucharist and certain weekly recurring Jewish rites. My remark is, that if they prove any thing, they, one and all, prove *too much*. For it must be clear to any ingenuous thinker, that, if our Lord had all or any of them in His mind when He instituted the Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood, and in-

tended them to furnish the rule of frequency for the celebration of the new Ordinance, His will is transgressed by greater, as well as by less, than the appointed frequency. Nor can it be doubted that, if such was His intention, it would at once be made known, not by implication, but explicitly, to His disciples. And I contend that it is incredible that those disciples, many of whom so loved Him as to be ready to die for Him, should immediately have so despised His Will as to celebrate daily that which He appointed for a weekly communion. Such officious "will-worship" would have been inconsistent with true filial obedience. It would have been as inconsistent in a Christian, as monthly celebration of the Passover would have been in an Israelite. And I therefore conclude that the very fact of the first Christians celebrating it at irregular intervals—daily, weekly, four times a week, and so on—affords the highest possible ground of presumption that the rate of frequency formed no "essential feature" of the Sacrament, no part of the Divine Institution.

I have now reviewed, I believe, the whole of the arguments on which you contend for the Divine obligation of weekly communion. Others must decide whether I have shown—what it was my purpose to show—that they afford no sufficient ground for the damning charge which you have brought against eleven thousand of your brethren. As to your arguments from analogy, they are so full of assumption, and are used so arbitrarily to meet the necessities of your position, that it has greatly surprised me that they should ever have been gravely urged as arguments at all. At the best they are but fancies, interesting possibilities, which may serve to occupy for a few hours the waking thoughts of persons who spend their lives in a sort of dreamy contemplation; but they are not calculated to strengthen

the convictions of any who desire sound reasons for their faith and practice. It will seem presumptuous in me, being myself unlearned, to express such an opinion of one who enjoys so high a reputation as a ritualist and theologian; but I must candidly avow that for these instances of presumed analogy, you appear to me to have been indebted less to your learning than to your ingenuity. There may be danger—and if your view be correct, and our Blessed Lord conveyed His Will by such obscurely expressed intimations as you have supposed, there would be very great danger—of our unwittingly transgressing it, not only in this, but in many other particulars; but I entreat you to reflect whether, in assuming the fact upon such grounds as you have chosen, and then basing upon it a charge of such a nature against your fellow-clergymen and fellow-Christians, there may be no danger of offending (unintentionally, of course, but through too great recklessness of assertion) against the Ninth Commandment.

You contend, however, not only that weekly communion is of Divine obligation, but that the Church of England recognizes it as such, and enjoins it on her people. Here also, dear Mr. Archdeacon, I regret that I cannot fall in with your conclusions. And, although the earlier Service Books are of no authority in this matter, yet as they are not without their use in illustrating the intentions of the framers of our present Liturgy, I willingly accompany you in tracing the various alterations on this subject.

For many centuries before the Reformation, as we all know, however frequently the Eucharist was consecrated, the people generally partook of it but once a year. At other times, the whole of the consecrated elements were consumed by the priest alone, the people attending only as spectators and worshippers.

One of the first steps of the Reformation in England was to correct this unscriptural practice. In the first year of King Edward VI., a short form was issued, in English, for insertion in the Latin Mass, entitled, "The Order of the Communion;" by means of which both parts of the Sacrament were to be administered to the lay people. This was intended only as a temporary arrangement; and, as there could be no communion without communicants, and in many parts the people were indisposed to partake more frequently than they had been used to do, it probably was not very successful. Whether this was so or not, King Edward's First Book, which was issued in the following year (1549), contained a provision, the object of which was to *ensure* the attendance of at least one person to communicate with the priest, and so to prevent a solitary mass. With this view, it was required that that house in each parish, whose turn it was "to offer for the charges of the communion," should provide also a communicant. Thus it was—by ensuring a *communion*, and not by ensuring it "on *Sundays* only," as you contend^s—that "the receiving of the Sacrament [was to be made] most agreeable to the institution thereof, and to the usage of the Primitive Church." Not Sunday celebration, so much as *the prevention of solitary masses*, was the object of this arrangement. How far the plan succeeded, we have no means of ascertaining. Most probably the attempt to enforce it met with the strongest opposition, and helped to cause serious disturbances; because, among the demands of the west country rebels in the latter part of the same year, we find the following: "We will have the Sacrament of the Altar *but at Easter* delivered unto the lay-people."

^s P. 29.

On the publication of King Edward's Second Book three years afterwards, the above-mentioned provision was abandoned. During the interval between the two books, the opinions of many of the leaders of the Reformation underwent great alteration; and although it may be true that (as you say) the Second Book was issued in part by the same men who issued the First, yet, when it is considered that Cranmer had meanwhile given up his belief in the Real Presence—that Peter Martyr and Bucer had been installed as Professors of Divinity at Oxford and Cambridge—and that other foreign Reformers, such as a Lasco, Bullinger, and even Calvin, were accepted as advisers, it cannot with truth be contended that it was issued by men “*professing the same doctrine*”⁹. In cathedral and collegiate churches, where many priests and deacons would usually be congregated, weekly participation was still required. But in ordinary parish churches, communion at any particular time, except Easter, was made altogether voluntary. Provision was made indeed, in the service, for weekly celebration, if a sufficient number of communicants signified their intention of partaking; but, as no one was absolutely required to receive more than thrice in the year, and the priest was *distinctly forbidden* to celebrate unless he had “a good number” (at least three in a parish containing only twenty adults) to communicate with him, it is not probable that weekly celebration ever prevailed to any large extent in the Reformed Church of England. The oft-drawn picture which you have reproduced—of the priest standing ready to administer, and the people refusing to receive—is altogether imaginary; for, as intending communicants were required to give

⁹ See Preface to Cardwell's “Two Liturgies of Edward VI.,” and “Wilberforce on the Holy Eucharist,” p. 378.

previous notice—a requirement not then, as now, habitually dispensed with—the celebrant could never be placed in the supposed state of ignorant expectancy. Moreover, in order to provide for the contingency of none presenting themselves, and apparently in the expectation that it would not seldom occur, the service appointed to be read “upon the holy days” (including, I must presume¹, Sundays) when there was no communion, was considerably altered, with the view of better adapting it for use by itself. The Ten Commandments, with intervening supplications for pardon and grace, were prefixed to it; the Prayer for the Church Militant was brought to an earlier position, so as to be included in it; and the jubilant “Gloria in Excelsis” was removed to the Post-communion. Surely, this deliberate provision of an alternative, together with the absence of any warning as to the guilt of neglect, is scarcely consistent with belief in weekly celebration as a duty of Divine obligation.

Many causes doubtless concurred in preventing the people from availing themselves of the privilege thus placed within their reach. There was the indisposition arising from previous contrary habit. There was also the low ground on which Bucer and those who thought with him recommended the duty. To celebrate it but seldom, he argued, or to confine it to a few well-disposed ones, is to adopt “that mistaken opinion that more is presented to us by Christ’s visible signs than by the preached Gospel; or that more faith and piety are required for receiving the sacrament than for the rest of the worship of God².” The influence of Calvin,

¹ This is no mere presumption of mine. Bp. Cosin positively states that it was so. Works, vol. v., p. 125. And Bp. Wren gave order on the same understanding. Cardwell’s “Doc. Ann.” ii. 251.

² Censura, c. 27.

also, whose followers in England and Scotland were satisfied with receiving four times in the year³, would have weight with many. And there was also the deterring effect of the exhortations—or, as I have heard them called, *dehortations*—which, as previous private confession was no longer required, the Church had thought it needful to introduce into the Liturgy, with the view of saving her people from the guilt and danger of unworthy reception. But whatever were the causes, it is little else than certain that opportunities of weekly communion were not very extensively either demanded or embraced. After the short reign of Queen Mary, the Second Book of Edward was revived in 1559, with scarcely a verbal alteration in the rubrics as to frequency. Yet, within six years of that date, it would appear that even in cathedrals the order of the Book was not obeyed. It must be admitted that, at no time was any attempt made to enforce weekly reception on the ground of a Divine command; but in 1564 and 1571, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York found it needful to urge the cathedral clergy, by very earnest injunctions, to the observance even of *monthly* communions. In 1604, or within less than one half-century of Queen Elizabeth's accession, the practice of the clergy and the disposition of the people were sufficiently indicated by the Twenty-first and Twenty-second Canons now in force. By the former of these, administration was ordered in all parish churches "so often and at such times as that every parishioner might communicate at least thrice in the year, whereof the feast of Easter to be one⁴." And by the latter that, "whereas every lay person is bound to receive thrice every year, and many notwithstanding

³ Thorndike, v. 192.

⁴ Hence arose, doubtless, the custom (until recently almost invariable in country parishes) of *quarterly* communions.

do not receive once in the year," therefore every minister was required "to give warning to his parishioners publicly in the church at Morning Prayer, *the Sunday before every time of his administering the Holy Sacrament*;" such previous notice clearly implying that the Holy Eucharist neither was administered nor was supposed to be administered, on *every Sunday*. These Canons afforded subject-matter for inquiry to Archbishops Bancroft and Abbott, in their Visitation Articles of 1605 and 1616; and in 1636, Bishop Wren more distinctly impressed on them the meaning I am contending for, by requiring "the minister and churchwardens of great parishes, to avoid confusion and overlong wearying of the minister and of the parishioners, to take order that there may not come above three hundred, or at the most four hundred communicants to one communion, for which occasion they are warned to have communions the oftener⁵." It is simply incredible that such canons and orders as these should have been issued without the smallest hint of the duty of weekly communion, if it was believed that that duty had been imposed on us by our Divine Lord.

After the Restoration, the tenor of the above-mentioned Canons was extended to the Rubrics of the Liturgy. The minister was now expressly directed to give warning of the communion, and to read one of the Invitatory Exhortations, not (as before) on the Communion Sunday, but on *the Sunday preceding*. And the "Missa Sicca" (as it has been contemptuously termed), or Second Service, was now expressly, as I believe it had been before implicitly, appointed to be read on *Sundays*, as well as holy days, when there is no communion.

From what has been said, then, it is easy to infer

⁵ "Doc. Ann.," ii. 256.

the present law of the Church of England with respect to frequent communion. 1. Provision is made for its celebration in ordinary parish churches on every Sunday and holy day, if both minister and people are disposed to have it so. 2. Provision is made also for its *omission* on those occasions on which it has not been previously resolved to administer it. 3. It is *ordered* to be received every Sunday in cathedral and collegiate churches and colleges where there are many priests and deacons. 4. All the lay-members of the Church are required to receive it at the least three times in the year, of which Easter must be one. 5. Parochial ministers are directed to administer it so often as that their parishioners may be able, without difficulty, to obey this requirement. 6. They are to give warning the Sunday before they so administer it. 7. They are never to administer it unless there be "a convenient number" to communicate with them. And, 8. The minister and churchwardens of each parish are directed to present to the Bishop or his Chancellor all those of their parishioners who do not at least receive at Easter (Canon 112).

Now in all this, what proof is there that the Reformed Church of England holds, or ever held, weekly communion to be a duty of Divine obligation, or an essential feature of the Sacrament? Neither in Liturgy, nor in Article, nor in Catechism, nor in Canon, nor in Homily, has she expressed such an opinion. If she ever held that such frequency of celebration and reception was part of her Lord's dying command, she has left it to be inferred from the one fact of her having made its observance possible, in the midst of many orders and omissions of order totally inconsistent with such a belief. She has never impressed it as a duty, either on her clergy or her people. She has ever appeared to intimate that, much as she esteemed

frequent communion, she held worthy participation to be more important still; and that she would rather see her Eucharists thinly or infrequently attended, than that any, by receiving carelessly, should “to their condemnation eat and drink the sign and sacrament of so great a thing” (Art. XXIX.). Her mind upon this point, it appears to me, cannot be better expressed than in the following recommendation of Archbishop Sancroft, issued not many years after the last revision:—That the clergy “use their utmost endeavour, both in their sermons and by private applications, to prevail with such of their flock as are of competent age, to receive frequently the Holy Communion; and to this end, that they administer it in the greater towns once in every month, and even in the lesser, too, if communicants may be procured; or, however, as oft as they may; and that they take all due care, both by preaching and otherwise, to prepare all for the worthy receiving of it⁶.”

The practice of other great lights of the English Church appears to have been in conformity with the views already expressed. Monthly communions appear to have satisfied Bishops Andrewes and Laud, Nicholas Ferrar, Herbert, and Dr. Hammond⁷. And although I have referred to Hooker, Beveridge, Taylor, Thorn-dike, Johnson, and other advocates of *frequent* communion, not omitting Dr. Pusey and Archdeacon R. I. Wilberforce, I have as yet failed to discover a single writer who has maintained the duty of weekly communion on the ground that such frequency formed part of the Divine institution. It has remained, I verily believe, for an Archdeacon of Exeter, in the year of

⁶ “Doc. Ann.” ii. 374.

⁷ For the references, see Robertson’s “How shall we conform to the Liturgy?” pp. 229—232.

Grace, 1866, to develop for us this new "essential feature" of the Eucharist, and to evolve from the exuberant fertility of his imagination the "analogies" by which alone it can be supported.

But your pamphlet is issued, as I have already remarked, under the alleged auspices, and, in all appearance, with the approbation, of our diocesan. How has it come, then, I would ask, that his lordship, now for thirty-six years our venerated chief pastor, has never admonished us of this duty, and of the guilt and danger of neglecting it? He has done, in effect, the very contrary. In 1842, I remember it well, he charged us with extreme solemnity, that "one communion in every month is the very least which ought to satisfy any faithful pastor of the smallest parish^s." Many of us, whose communions had previously been only quarterly, acted on that admonition, and established a monthly celebration; and, I ask you, how can it be otherwise than heart-breaking to us to be now told, on the authority of the same Bishop (if, indeed, you speak with his authority), that his former advice fell short of the truth; that monthly communions are insufficient; that to celebrate weekly is of Divine obligation—a duty laid upon us by our Lord's dying command, from which He left no dispensation; and that, consequently, nothing less than weekly communion ought to satisfy the faithful pastor of *any* parish? For, I would beg you to observe, if the case be as you represent it, it is one which admits of the application of no *gradual* remedies; it cannot be met by the substitution, first of fortnightly, and then of what you poetically call "the full orb'd round" of weekly celebration; it is a question of disobedience or obedience, of sin or godliness; and the only way in

^s Bp. of Exeter's Charge, 1842, p. 27.

which sincere repentance for past neglect can be satisfactorily evinced, is by the instant observance of that essential feature of the Sacrament which (you tell us) we have hitherto overlooked.

But I do not believe—nor, until I hear it from himself, will I believe—that his lordship has so erred himself, or misled his clergy. Until I learn it from himself, I will not believe that he ever thought, or thinks, weekly communion to be of Divine obligation; even though the alternative be, that he may seem to have incautiously given the sanction of his *imprimatur*, and the recommendation of his great name, to a pamphlet of which he did not know the contents.

Happy were it, indeed, if the state of this nation were such that our spiritual fathers could, as you propose, safely recommend to their clergy generally the adoption of weekly communions in their parishes. But they are too deeply imbued with the spirit of our Prayer Book to venture on such a step. They know too well the reasons of that increasing earnestness, with which, from the Reformation downwards, our Church has warned her people of the great peril of unworthy receiving; and they would not dare to issue an order, the result of which might be to bring the Sacrament into contempt by its frequent and manifest profanation. Whatever Bucer may have thought as to the relative importance of the Eucharist and the ordinary worship of God, our Bishops recognize the superior “dignity of the holy mystery;” and they would doubtless be loth to take any step which might have the effect of obliterating the same distinction in the minds of the people. If indeed they felt, with you, that such frequency would “alone fulfil the commandment of Christ,” they would feel also that the case was one in which no option remained to them. But they know that they could not employ that argu-

ment for enforcing it, without exceeding the teaching of their own Church, and perhaps being guilty also of “adding to the things that are written” in the Divine Book. They remember that while Christ and the Church have declared this Sacrament to be necessary to salvation, they have not attached such necessity to any particular degree of frequency in the reception of it; nor do they hold the spiritual growth of Christians to be so “absolutely suspended” upon it, as that their advancement may not be aided by other means of grace, “faith being confirmed, and grace increased by virtue of prayer to God” (Art. XXVII.). And they are of opinion probably, that, as there is at present *no bar* to weekly celebration, it is infinitely wiser to leave the question of frequency, as the Church has left it, to be decided by each parochial minister according to his own knowledge of his parishioners, than to precipitate it by an indiscriminating order in all places alike.

Whether an Apostle, if he were now to visit England, would fix his attention upon the infrequency of communions as “the *only* point absolutely wanting [in our religious worship on Sundays] to complete our agreement, in every particular, with the Apostolic practice⁹,” and would infer from such infrequency, “that he was not in a Christian land at all¹,” is a point which I will not presume to decide. It may occur to me to imagine that such an one, judging (as he would judge) “according to the proportion of faith,” might find his attention so riveted by other and graver defects, not so much in worship as in practice, as to have but little heart for dwelling on errors in such matters as Rites and Ritual. When called to notice them, he would doubtless be pained at seeing that the

⁹ P. 34.

¹ P. 88.

blessings of the Holy Eucharist were so little esteemed; that opportunities of so "showing forth the Lord's death" were not more gladly embraced; that communions were infrequent, and communicants rare; and that many, professing themselves to be Christians, nevertheless never presented themselves at the Lord's Table, from the font to the grave. But, howsoever he might lament these evidences of lukewarmness and declension, I believe that not even the desire of reviving the practice of weekly celebrations would reconcile him to what he might regard as a pious fraud—pretending the authority of a Divine commandment, where (so far as we know) no such commandment was ever given.

And now, my dear Mr. Archdeacon, again expressing my regret for the occasion which has obliged me thus to address you,

I beg you to believe me,

Yours very faithfully,

R. H. FORTESCUE.

Stockleigh Pomeroy,
June 4th, 1866.

APPENDIX.

It was not my purpose to notice the Archdeacon's remarks on Ritual, but there are two points on which, as I am writing, I will add a few words.

I. As to the position of the priest in celebrating the Holy Communion. The Archdeacon contends for the novel practice, by which so much offence is given, of standing near the north-western corner of the Table, and turning his back on the congregation; his object being to "signify and express thereby the solemn oblation and sacrificial presentation," &c. (p. 73). With his usual confidence of assumption, he affirms that "there is no real doubt whatever" that this was the intention of the English Church. His argument is, that of old the altar was distinguished into three parts,—the middle part, the left or northern side, and the right or southern side; so that when, in King Edward's Second Book, the minister was directed to stand, not (as previously), "afore the midst of the altar," but "at the north side of the Table," it was intended that he should place himself, not (as we understand it) at the north *end*, but a few inches to the left of his previous position, facing the northern portion of the western side. The word "at," he tells us, with another assumption not less large than convenient, "in all cases certainly meant with the face turned *eastwards*."

Of course, unless the opinions of all who differ from him are to be ignored, there is *a great deal* of doubt as to the correctness of the Archdeacon's view. In the interval between Edward's First and Second Books, altars were abolished; and it may reasonably be assumed that the fanciful division of them into three parts, if known to the Reformers, departed with them. At any rate, there is no shadow of proof that it was transferred to Tables. And although, in speaking of a table of oblong shape, we commonly describe it as having two sides and two ends, yet if we placed such a table altar-wise, with its ends north and south, and then

described its limits by the points of the compass, we should at once treat it as four-sided, and the ends would become the north and south *sides*. An expression in the Scotch Liturgy confirms this view, the Presbyter being there directed to stand "at the north side or end," as if the terms were (as they are) convertible¹. Moreover, it is difficult to conceive how a surpliced Minister, standing where the Archdeacon proposes, could "break the bread *before* the people," i. e. so that his action might be seen by them; or what need there would be for his "ordering" the bread and wine before consecration, for they would be already within his reach. Again, the Church has avowed her desire to place the minister, and the Table also (see Canon 82), where he "may be more conveniently *heard* in his ministration;" but how can a man be heard if he turns his back on the people? Adding to these considerations the fact of almost universal and unbroken custom, I think we may feel satisfied that the practice with which we are most familiar, and which is not offensive to our people—of standing at the north end, with face turned southward—is that also which the rubric enjoins, and which we have solemnly promised to conform to.

II. I wished to notice, secondly, the tone in which the Archdeacon speaks of the vestment or ritual controversy of 1840-5. After most erroneously describing it, he coolly pronounces that "the last contest was simply a miserable one!" (p. 90.) Now, considering that a principal mover in that former contest was one to whom the Archdeacon owes so much as to the present Bishop of Exeter, I think he might have used a milder word. It is evident, however, from his contemptuous description of that contest, that he altogether misconceives its nature. It was *not* a contest "about the surplice in preaching as against the gown; and the prayer for the Church Militant, as against the disuse of it." It might more truly be described as a contest for certain duties to the fulfilment of which the Clergy conceived themselves to be solemnly pledged, as against the neglect of them. It was a mere accident of the contest that, through lay opposition fastening itself on the use of the prayer for the Church Militant, a greater prominence was given to that

¹ In a recent pamphlet on "The North-side of the Altar," the author found this order of the Scotch Liturgy an awkward difficulty in his way; but he solved it by at once asserting that it was *left to the option* of the Scottish Clergy to stand in either place! The same writer narrates, with great glee, his having discovered at some railway-station a western platform, one end of which was distinguished (just as he would have it to be in the case of the Communion-Table), as "the north-side." I surmise that he and his informant, the railway-porter, did not quite understand one another.

prayer, and to the consequently necessary use of the surplice in preaching, than to the other matters contended for.

The true history of the contest was as follows:—The attention of the Clergy had been called to the manifest duty of conforming to the rubrics. Many pamphlets were published on the subject. Our own Bishop had adverted to it in his charges of 1839 and 1842. An article, reprinted from the “Christian Remembrancer” of April, 1843, on “The *Moral Effect* of Irregularities in the Ritual of the Church,” convinced many. So far as I remember, its argument was, that after having solemnly declared, before our parishioners, that we would “conform to the Liturgy,” we must be despised by our people, and despise ourselves, if we did *not* conform to it. The particulars in which we were deficient were easily discovered; and the result was that many, out of *simple regard for truth*, adopted daily service, public catechising, public baptism, the solemn oblation of the elements at the prescribed time, and by the hands of the minister; and (because this rubric was so plain, that its meaning could not be evaded) the use of the Prayer for the Church Militant on Sundays when there was no Communion. And as this prayer must be read at the altar, many clergymen, in order to avoid the delay and inconvenience of changing before and after sermon, began to preach in the surplice. The principle involved, however, was not the relative importance of a black or a white vestment, but simple regard for truth. And does a contest for such a principle as this deserve to be called a “miserable” one? I venture to say that no one ever before called it so who understood it.

The rubric on which the present dispute about vestments relies, is no plain, self-contained one, as in the former case; but one referring to the usage of three hundred years ago, and involving a legal and historical inquiry of some difficulty. Its very meaning, therefore, and consequently its moral obligation, is doubtful; so doubtful, that the Archdeacon of Exeter, after having about three months since decided it in one sense, has now the mortification of seeing it determined by some of the most eminent lawyers of the day in the opposite sense.

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