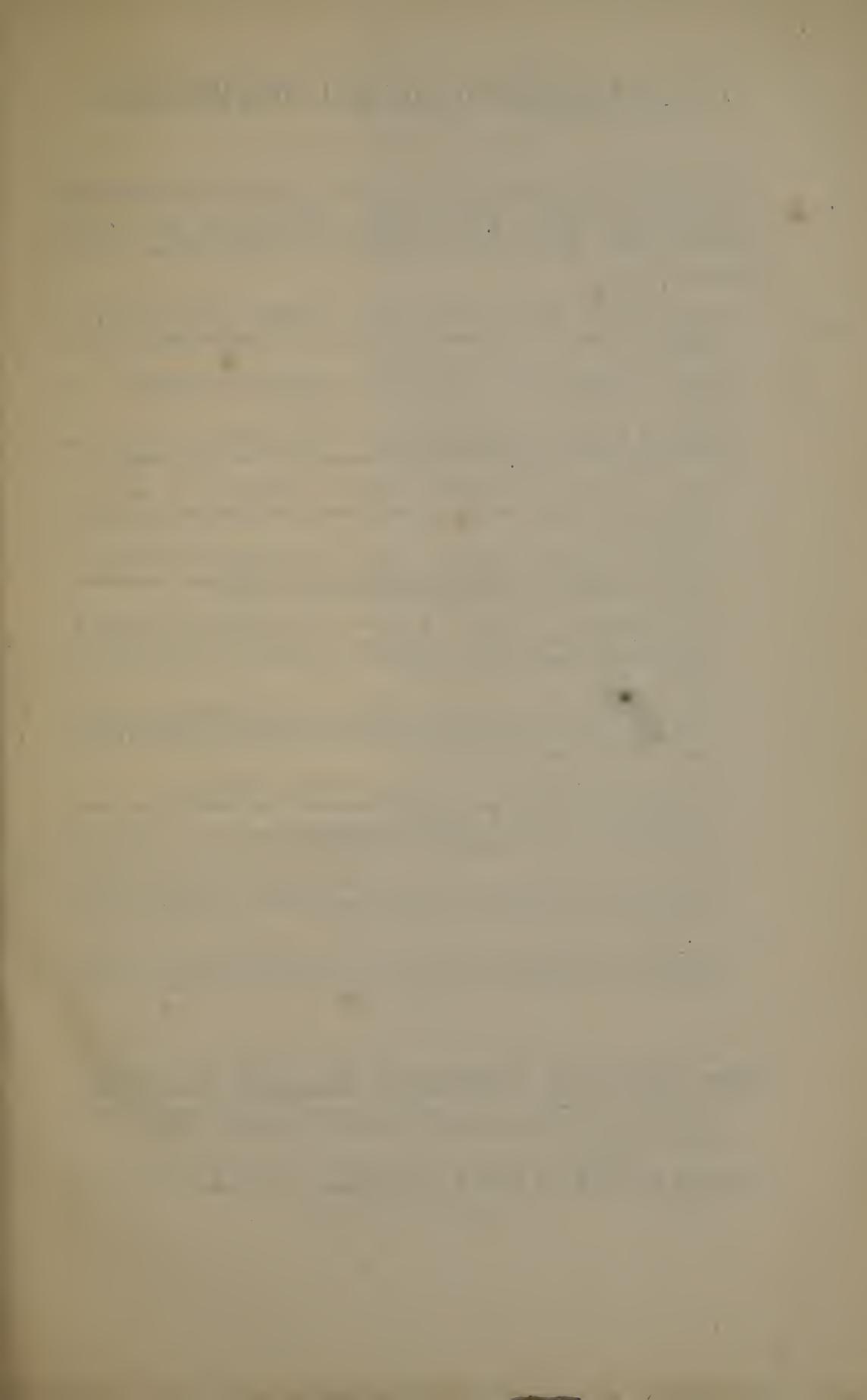


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Liturgical Vestments.

A LETTER

ADDRESSED BY PERMISSION

TO

His Grace

The Archbishop of Canterbury

BY THE

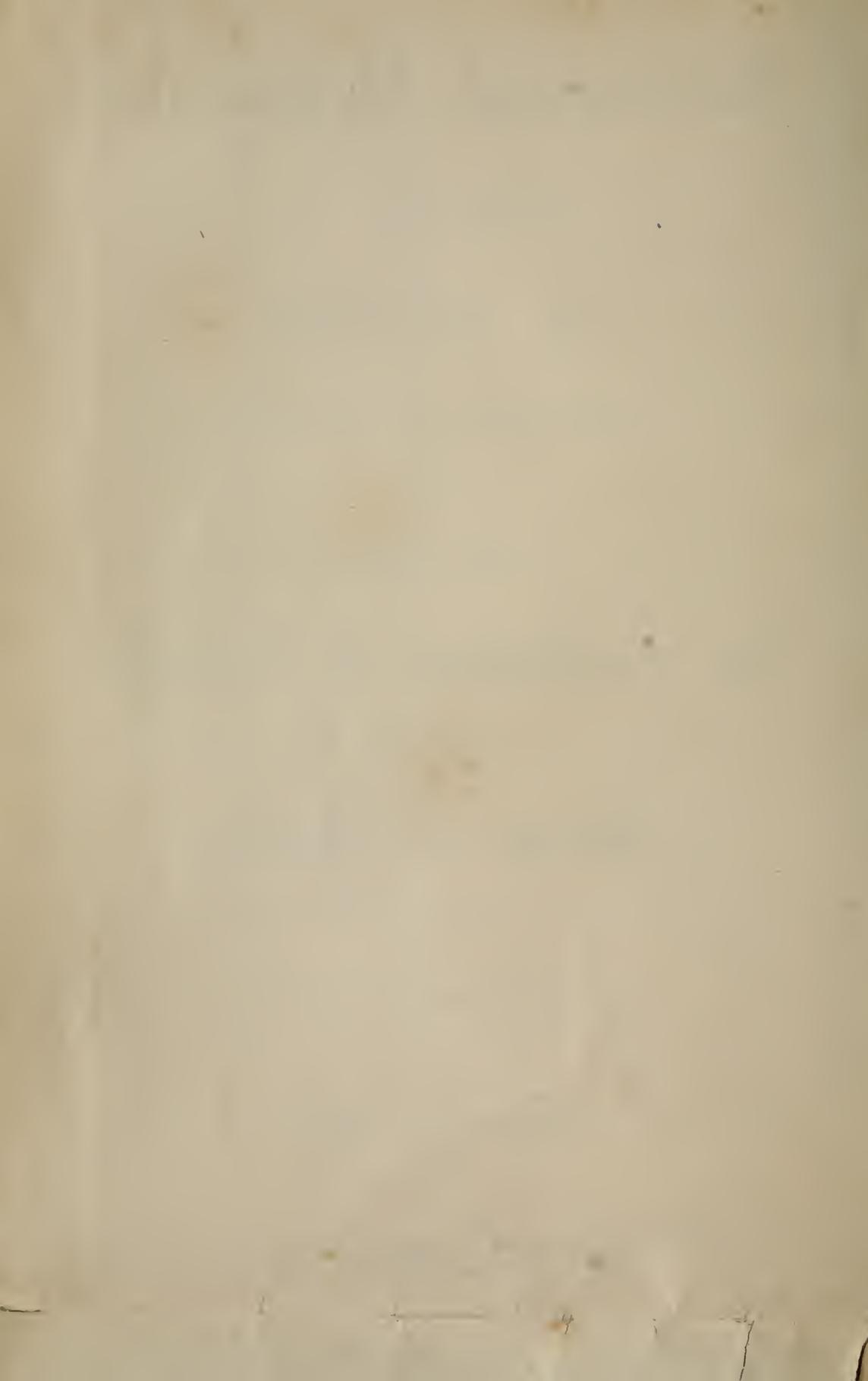
Bishop of Chester.

SEPTEMBER, 1905.

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Liturgical Vestments.

MY LORD ARCHBISHOP,

I have your Grace's permission to address you upon the subject of Liturgical Vestments, the responsibility for what is said remaining of course entirely my own. By some the question will be thought too trivial, by others too intractable, to justify expenditure upon it of time and effort. It may be asked, moreover,—why meddle with the matter just now when it is under consideration by a Royal Commission, whose Report is likely to be presented at no distant date? To this objection I reply that the effect of the Commissioners' Recommendations, whatever they may be, will largely depend upon the mood in which they find the main body of Churchpeople, and therefore an attempt to prepare the ground of public opinion for receiving in an unprejudiced and co-operative spirit the seed of wise counsel may be of some service.

I.

That the subject of Liturgical Vestments is in its own nature of quite minor importance I profoundly feel and readily allow. It belongs to the category of things in themselves indifferent and alterable, and it stands by no means in the front rank of even that category. As a point of Christian taste and art, "the attire which the minister of God is by order to use at times of divine service" has a legitimate but subordinate place. It is "a matter of mere formality," and yet, for comeliness' sake, to be dealt with "in a seemly and due order." It surely "argueth a disproportioned mind" to make too much either way of such a detail. The essential insignificance of the question becomes even painfully apparent when we contrast it with those weightier matters—social, moral and doctrinal,—which concern the very life of Churches

and nations, and demand the whole-hearted attention, the concentrated energies, of all who profess and call themselves Christians, and not least of our own branch of the Catholic Church. It is pitiable indeed that, decade after decade, the Church of England should be baffled by a problem of externals, when opportunities and responsibilities of vital importance are summoning her to worthier work.

And yet the busy spirit of Vestiarism, or of Anti Vestiarism (for it manifests itself in either form), not content with the troubles caused in earlier days by Puritan objections to the Surplice, has reappeared in our own times to play its part on the opposite side. Availing itself of the Ornaments' rubric, in the *prima facie* meaning of that diversely interpreted direction, it assumed the grave responsibility of reviving the use of long-obsolete vestments, and thus contributed a fresh apple of discord to our Church's already plentiful supply. In the course of the controversy which followed, the simple question of dress became entangled with really grave questions of doctrine, worship and ecclesiastical law. The thing indifferent came to be conscientiously regarded as a matter involving essentials, and thus magnified, it gave abundant but not very fruitful employment to Parliament and the Convocations, to Law Courts and Royal Commissions. The story of repressive legislation, of prosecutions, of the coercive policy and its failure, need not be told again.

In weary reaction from that long and unprofitable turmoil we have lapsed into a somewhat anarchical plight. "The law as at present authoritatively declared is, that the cope is to be worn in ministering the holy communion in cathedrals and collegiate churches, and the surplice in all other ministrations, and that all other vestments are illegal." (Talbot, *Modern Decisions on Ritual*, p. 117). But the

reasoning on which this decision rests has failed to convince; and the objections which had been urged against the constitution of the Court of Final Appeal itself are thought to have been justified by the Report of the Ecclesiastical Courts Commission (1883). With the law and the Supreme Court standing thus at a disadvantage, the idea of reverting to the policy of prosecution for disobedience is entertained only by extreme Anti-Vestiarrians. Incumbents and congregations are in this matter unavoidably left to do very much what is right in their own eyes; and that the vestments which have been pronounced illegal are not more widely introduced is due, partly, to the good sense of the Clergy as a body, partly, to there being no longer prosecutions to exasperate, and, partly, to the restraining influence of the Bishops, whose work in this way has been very imperfectly recognized. But, taken at its best, this can hardly be deemed a creditable or wholesome position of affairs, and the appointment of another Royal Commission is a testimony to that effect.

We are now awaiting with mingled anxiety and hope the Report of this Commission, and the interval, I submit, may be well employed by Churchmen of all schools in seriously considering what is likely to happen if we prefer to remain in a state of "do-nothing perplexity,"† and whether any better course is open to us?

If we remain where we are, one of two things may come to pass. Leaving our differences unsettled, we may so strenuously devote ourselves to the main duties of Church life, may so exercise ourselves in healthy endeavours to promote the Kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the HOLY GHOST, as by degrees to outgrow our disorders and disproportions, thus finding the corrective for them in laudable service.

Or we may have to be scourged by the discipline of some calamity into a saner state of mind. Disestablishment and

Disendowment, for example, or the humiliating discovery that, while ecclesiastical zealots have been disputing about non-essentials, the essentials of our Faith, the habit of worship, and morality itself, have lost their hold upon the bulk of the Nation,—some such chastisement as this may be needed to teach us what we have been so culpably slow to learn.

But is it sound policy either to count upon such a liberal respite as the former alternative implies, or to challenge by delay the infliction of some purifying disaster? May there not still be open to us some third course more in keeping with that practical wisdom which the children of light are bidden to cultivate?

II.

Your Grace is already acquainted with my conviction that there is such a course, and your wide knowledge of what is going on in men's minds will, I think, bear me out in claiming that, if I err, I at all events err in good company. In stating my view I shall avail myself largely of what others have written, and at the outset, a Memorial presented to Archbishop Tait by Dean Church and others in 1877 (Tait's Life, ii., 289), will supply *the central idea*.—

"Believing, as we do," say the Memorialists, "in the presence in the Church of her Divine Head, we are convinced that what is required is not the mere interpretation, however skilful, of existing law, but the living voice of the Church clearly laying down what the law shall be in the future."

Events since 1877 have surely lent support to this opinion. It may now be maintained with added weight of experience that our real need is a new rubric (or group of rubrics) which shall express the living mind of the Church, constitutionally ascertained and unambiguously set forth. The preparation of such a rubric would naturally be undertaken by the Convocations and Lay Houses, who, for Committee work, would command the services of specially qualified Clergymen and Laymen representing every school of thought. Assuming that their labours reach a sufficiently harmonious conclusion, the business would be ripe for consideration by Parliament, and would no doubt be there dealt

† "I felt dismay at her prospects, anger and scorn at her do-nothing perplexity."—Newman's *Apologia*—written of the Church of England as it looked to him "amid the encircling gloom" of 1833.

THE PALACE,
CHESTER.

With the
writer's kind
regards.

Oct- 1905.

† See also (S.P.C.K.) *Early Christian Worship*,
by A. J. Maclean, D.D., pp. 106-7:—

“The *Canons of Hippolytus* (p. 201) mention Eucharistic Vestments. The presbyters and deacons are to assemble (we read) for Holy Communion with the bishop, ‘clad in white vestments, more beautiful than those of all the people, especially splendid. But good works are better than all vestments. Even the readers are to have festal garments.’” At the Council of Laodicea (c. 380 A.D.) stoles are mentioned. But, “on the whole, the information to be gained from the latest discoveries as to the vesture of the clergy is almost *nil*.”



with in a spirit corresponding to the temper exhibited by the Synods of the Church. Does the procedure I am supposing ask too much for, or of, the Church? Is it too sanguine in its reliance upon the fairmindedness of the House of Commons? I am confident that your Grace will forbid us to despair of the State, ecclesiastical or civil.

But the question that mainly concerns us is not whether we can command success, but how best we may deserve it. To what model shall we look for guidance? What principles and precedents have the strongest claim upon our regard? The model may be found in St Paul's way of dealing with the problems he was called upon to solve. I avail myself of Professor Sabatier's words to shew what that way was.

"Such is the order of this first epistle (to the Corinthians). In spite of the variety of questions touched upon, a profound unity prevails throughout it. Paul's dialectical mind, instead of stopping short at the surface of these particular questions and losing itself in the details of a finely drawn casuistry, always ascends from facts to principles, and thus sheds a fuller light on all the difficulties presented to it by the way. After he has carried the mind of his readers up to the serene heights of Christian thought, he sweeps down from this elevation with irresistible force; and each solution that he suggests is simply a new application of the permanent and general principles of the Gospel." *The Apostle Paul*, p. 161.)

A pattern of a different order is supplied by the late Wharton Marriott's *Vestiarium Christianum* (1868), which traces "the origin and gradual development of the dress of Holy Ministry in the Church." What the author in his preface says of others may well be applied to himself, and suggest a standard for the work which this letter has in view:—

"I ought not to conclude without saying how much I owe to more than one foreign writer whose books I have laid under contribution. Treating though they do of subjects keenly controverted for the last 300 years, they write in a spirit of loyal devotion to the Truth, and the Truth alone, such as others differing widely from them in doctrinal prepossessions, may well desire to imitate. In saying this, I refer particularly to Dr. Hefele, and the Chevalier De Rossi, from both of whom I have learnt much, and hope to learn much more."

It is to be regretted that this admirable treatise, so scholarly, comprehensive and temperate, should now be so hard to

obtain. Could S.P.C.K. do anything to promote the knowledge of this rare piece of Christian research? The Society has recently done good work in translating Mgr. Duchesne's *Origines du culte Chrétien*, which contains a valuable chapter on Liturgical Vestments.† The following extracts will give some idea of Mr. Marriott's method and main conclusions.

"Dividing the history of the Church, for the purposes of this inquiry, into three periods, we may regard the first, or Primitive Period, as extending to the close of the four first centuries. The second, or Transition Period, as of 400 years more, to the close of the 8th century. The third period may be considered as extending to the present time, but as subdivided, in respect of the Churches of the West, by the Reformation.

In the Primitive Period, of about 400 years, the dress of Christian Ministry was in form, in shape, in distinctive name, identical with the dress worn by persons of condition, on occasions of joyous festival, or solemn ceremonial. And this was a dress which in suchwise differed from the Habit of every-day life, and of ordinary wear, that it was marked out plainly in the eyes of all as a garb proper to occasions of religious worship, and of solemn assembly in the presence of God.

In the centuries that have elapsed since the close of that first Period, modifications of the Primitive type, and additions to it, have been made from time to time. These modifications and additions have varied in degree, and in kind, in various branches of the Church. And when traced (as they admit of being traced) to their causes, they are found to reflect faithfully important changes through which such churches have passed, either inwardly, by reason of innovations upon Primitive Doctrine, or outwardly through vicissitudes of political position. . . . When, after the revival of ancient learning, the Church of England reformed her faith and her discipline, upon the authority of Holy Scripture and the model of the Primitive Church, considerable changes were made among ourselves in that Mediæval and Roman type of dress. And the result has been that the customary ministering dress of the English clergy during the last 300 years, (i.e., the full, flowing surplice, with scarf or stole) has been in colour and general appearance, though not in name, all but exactly identical with that which we find assigned to the Apostles in the earliest monuments of Christendom, and which, upon similar evidence, we shall find reason to conclude was, in point of fact, the dress of Christian Ministry in the primitive ages of the Church."

(Introduction, pp. iii., v.)

And, again,

"On a review of the whole evidence from early literature bearing upon this question, we shall conclude, without doubt, that the dress appropriate to the most solemn offices of holy ministry, during the primitive age, was white.

And if we turn next to the monumental evidence, whether in the frescoes of the Roman Catacombs, or in the mosaics of early churches at Rome, Ravenna, Constantinople, we shall find that it confirms in the strongest manner the conclusion, which by a separate path we have already reached.

And lastly, I may add, that the traditions of the Church, both in literature and in art, for nearly 1000 years after the primitive period, bear witness incidentally to the same conclusion. Again and again, even in mediæval writers, do we find recognition of white vestments as being the *proper* garb of Christian ministry. And in the later art monuments exhibited in this volume, it will be seen, that the dress attributed to the Apostles in the frescoes of the Roman Catacombs, and in early monuments of the East, is reproduced century after century as their special characteristic, long after the general type of ministering dress had been altogether changed. On every ground, then, we may accept without hesitation a conclusion, in which all the best authorities on the subject are agreed; and hold that white was the colour appropriated in primitive times to the dress of Christian ministry.”

(pp. xxxiii—iv).

These extracts will bring to mind Hooker's defence of the Surplice against the Puritan objectors who tried to “wring out of Jerome and Chrysostom that which their words will not gladly yield.”

“They both speak of the same persons, namely, the Clergy; and of their weed at the same time, when they administer the blessed Sacrament; and of the self-same kind of weed, a white garment, so far as we have wit to conceive. . . . The honesty, dignity, and estimation of white apparel in the eastern part of the world is a token of greater fitness for this sacred use, wherein it were not convenient that anything basely thought of should be suffered” (E. P. v. xxix., 3).

What pure and sublime associations of idea belong in the symbolism of the New Testament to white as a colour, and especially to “white robes,” “fine linen, white and clean,” it would be superfluous to shew. But, having regard to those sublime associations, and to the evidence represented by the quotations I have given, may it not be said that the instinct of our Church was not far wrong, when for nearly 300 years after the Reformation—in spite of the Ornaments' Rubric, the Advertisements, and the 24th Canon of 1604, which plainly requires “Copes to be worn in Cathedral Churches by those that administer the Communion”—the surplice was almost everywhere and always adopted as the vestment than which none comelier could be found for even the highest act of Christian worship? In Hooker's glowing words—

“It suiteth so fitly with that lightsome affection of joy, wherein God delighteth

when His Saints praise him; and so lively resembleth the glory of the Saints in heaven, together with the beauty wherein Angels have appeared unto men, that they which are to appear for men in the presence of GOD as Angels, if they were left to their own choice and would choose any, could not easily devise a garment of more decency for such a service.” (v. xxix., 5.)

During this period the cope seems to have been almost entirely out of use, except in the modified form of the Episcopal chimere, (black or, in the convocation robes, red,)[†] which allows the primitive white vesture, as represented by the rochet with its ample sleeves of fine linen, to be fairly conspicuous. Authorities seem agreed that cope, chasuble, and chimere find their common origin in the all-enveloping and cowed or hooded cloak, which was worn out-of-doors towards the beginning of our era. This garment was gradually invested with a sacred character; it was enriched in material and with embroidery, and took different shapes to suit different uses. Its ampler form as the cope is more suitable for processions and such purposes, while in its reduced dimensions, as the chimere or the chasuble, it is more convenient for ministration, especially in the Communion. Whether—considering its secular origin and lack of Scriptural associations, as compared with the vestment it more or less hides—such a supervestment is a gain, I will not now argue. But, however we may eventually decide for ourselves, the concluding words of the Prayer Book Preface, “Of Ceremonies,” will hold good:—

“In these our doings we condemn no other Nations, nor prescribe any thing but to our own people only: For we think it convenient that every Country should use such Ceremonies as they shall think best to the setting forth of GOD's honour and glory, and to the reducing of the people to a most perfect and godly living, without error or superstition; and that they should put away other things, which from time to time they perceive to be most abused, as in men's ordinances it often chanceth diversly in divers' countries.”

One good result that may be looked for from a candid enquiry into this whole subject is that the connection between certain vestments and certain doctrines will be exhibited in the light of history, and we shall be enabled to judge how far that connection is radical or superficial.

[†] See *Vestiarium Christianum*, p. 226, note; and Archbishop Benson's *The Cathedral*, p. 46, note.

It will be remembered how, in the Lambeth Judgment of 1890, Archbishop Benson and his learned assessors, dispelled misconceptions on either side about the Eastward position.

“The imputed sacrificial aspect of the Eastward position is new and forced, and can take no effect in rendering that position either desirable on the one side, or illegal on the other.”

It is too true that those misconceptions still linger mischievously on, but they have lost much of their vitality and are doomed to disappear. It may be that a corresponding service will be rendered by the process I am advocating, as regards Liturgical Vestments and their doctrinal significance, real or supposed.

Once more, this problem of the dress of Holy Ministry, involving as it does a certain use of decorative Art, leads up to the question, Within what limits, and for what purposes, may the power of externals—may Art in its higher and subordinate branches, be legitimately employed in Christian worship? and to the further question which has been elaborately and sympathetically dealt with by Bishop Westcott in his Commentary on the Epistles of St John, What is the relation of Christianity to Art? As regards the former question, among the noteworthy things that have been written on the subject, I may perhaps select for reference what was said 70 years ago by Frederic Myers in his *Catholic Thoughts*, Book i., ch. xvi. ; ii., ch. xxv. A typical extract may be given.—

“True it is that the spiritual is not the mere absence of the visible: it is not the mere negation of the sensuous. Nor is Art necessarily a hindrance, but rather sometimes a help, to Worship. The Fine Arts would seem to be addressed to the higher parts of our nature chiefly, and to derive their main significance from them: and certainly if they should be found unto edification by any or by all there is nothing in the opinions of these Pages which would oppose their use. It is only here suggested, that to think and feel by the help of the senses is not an object encouraged by Christianity. It may perhaps be a part of that wisdom which the Christian is to borrow from the Serpent, to endeavour to turn those Arts which the world esteems so highly in its own service to the promotion of religion which it loves so little: certainly the Idea of Christianity subjugating all things unto itself—of Christians spoiling the world as Israel the Egyptians—is a grand Idea which may be attempted to be realised within certain limits. But though it may be a glory to believe that CHRIST’S religion can thus sanctify all human pursuits and appropriate to itself the best sympathies of our nature, yet it is

contended that these things must be kept subordinate, and that it is not by direct appeals to the weaker and more sensuous emotions that Christianity essays to sanctify or subdue the heart. He who knew what was in man, and the subtle connexion between body and soul, seems to have taught us by His silence and the absence of His own example and that of His commissioned Twelve, that it is really inexpedient though seeming wise, to think of bribing the senses in order to gain possession of the spirit.”

III.

On the whole, it seems obvious that in a National Church, reasonable room should be provided for different tastes and temperaments, for those two classes of mind, which may be variously described as Platonist and Aristotelian, imaginative and historical, Catholic and Puritan, æsthetic and unæsthetic. These we shall probably have always with us, and neither should be permitted to oppress the other. A *maximum* and a *minimum* in matters Vestiarian and in other respects might well be allowed, and the methods employed to procure observance of the conditions thus laid down should, as far as possible, be parental rather than coercive. But it should, I submit, be clearly understood and steadily maintained that the *maximum* is quantitative, not necessarily qualitative; that externals belong essentially to what St Paul terms ‘the elements of the world’—to those rudimentary lessons of outward things, which, as regards their spiritual effect, are comparatively ‘weak and poor,’—whose sphere is the mundane and the sensuous,—which, as a system, represent an earlier stage in the spiritual education of mankind, and large reliance upon which is inconsistent with Christian maturity. † If comparisons must be made,

† See Bishop Lightfoot on Galatians, iv., 3, 9, and Colossians, ii., 8, 20; and also Hebrews, ix., 10. See also Bishop Cotterill, *The Genesis of the Church*, 535–8. On p. 538, he writes:—

“The Mosaical ceremonies were ‘elements of the world,’ suited for the childhood of God’s sons, not for their manhood. As children and illiterate persons are instructed by pictures and signs, unsuited for educated men, at all events, if used in excess, likely to obscure knowledge rather than to advance it,—so the Mosaical law taught its lessons by multiplied rites and ceremonies. But for the Church to teach its lessons by such a method would be to return to a lower sphere, and to keep God’s sons in a state of childishness, instead of bringing them on to maturity. In this therefore discretion and judgment are needed to determine what is suitable, and what is not suitable, for manhood in Christ.”

a grave and simple comeliness, "neither too mean, nor yet too gay," † in the outward aids and adornments of Divine Service, is better entitled to the epithet "high" than is an elaborate and exuberant mode of worship. Its catholicity is of the more primitive type.

I have now rough-hewn a plan which others will, I trust, bring into shape with more skilful and effective strokes. It rests upon the conviction that, through the constitutional action of the Convocations and of Parliament, the living Church ought to lay down clearly and considerately what the law shall be in the future. I

† George Herbert, *The British Church*.

cannot but think that this is the sound way of dealing with our Vestiarian problem, and it may be found applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other problems as well. To ask your Grace to express any opinion about it would, under present circumstances, be quite unreasonable. But I venture to hope that, when you come to read this Letter, you may be of opinion (if I may detach these words from their famous context) "that it is not so clear a case that there is nothing in it."

I remain, my Lord Archbishop,

Very faithfully yours,

F. J. CESTR:

Sept. 3rd, 1905.

