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REVISION OF THE RUBRICS.

A PAPER

READ BY

THE HON. WILBRAHAM EGERTON, M.P.

AT THE

DIOCESAN CONFERENCE

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THE REVISION OF THE RUBRICS.

Mr. WILBRAHAM EGERTON said :—

The subject which I have been requested by the Bishop to bring before you is one which I shall endeavour to treat temperately and fairly, for it is a question of the greatest importance to the future of the English Church, and cannot but excite the deepest interest. The legislation of last Session produced a feeling of irritation in the minds of the Clergy which, I believe, arose more from the way in which it was brought forward than from the ultimate shape which it obtained; but I trust this feeling will pass away, and that they will consider calmly, and, if possible, without party spirit, the revision of the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer. I will first allude to the steps already taken in that direction. The Report of the Royal Commission on Ritual, which sat from 1867 to 1870, recommended alterations in the Rubrics for the purpose of “securing general uniformity of practice in those matters which may be deemed essential.” Their recommendations for adapting the services of the Church to the wants and circumstances of different congregations have already been secured in the “Uniformity Acts Amendment Act;” but the members of the Commission were not unanimous on other points, and their published reasons for dissent show the wide differences which exist among many earnest Churchmen, and the difficulties which encompass the whole subject. The only man, perhaps, who could have grappled fairly and broadly with it, and have held the just balance between parties, has been, to the great loss of

the English Church, removed from us. The late Bishop of Winchester laid down this most important principle, which, I think, cannot be too carefully borne in mind: "The written Rubric should define, as distinctly as possible, the common rule; but no written Rubric on such a subject can be made so explicit and so comprehensive as to meet the needs of every case, unless some discretion be lodged in a living authority"*—the Ordinary. The Ritual Commission expressed an opinion, in their first report, that it was expedient to restrain all variations in respect to vesture from that which has long been the established usage; but in their fourth report they could not agree on any amendment of the Ornaments Rubric, and it is owing to its obscure and debateable character that many of the departures from the uniformity in public worship have arisen, which rendered necessary the legislation of last Session. Their report was followed by the appointment of a Committee of the Lower House of Convocation of Canterbury† "to consider it, and whether it is desirable to introduce any changes into the Rubrics which regulate the conduct of the public services of the Church." This Committee reported that "while freely admitting that certain advantages might be attained by the alteration of some of the Rubrics, as, indeed, everything human is capable of some improvement, they are, nevertheless, of opinion that there is no actual necessity for such alteration." It, however, made comments on the recommendations of the Commissioners, and specially disapproves of the proposed alteration of the Rubric concerning the daily use of the Church Service. With regard to the Ornaments Rubric, it suggests a new one, sanctioning the use of copes in cathedral and collegiate churches, and in other churches the usual surplice and stole, and vestments only with the permission of the Ordinary. The Lower House did not agree to this or other suggestions of the Committee on most of the controverted points. The Convocation of the Northern Province has con-

* Fourth Report of the Ritual Commissioners, p. 10.

† Report of the Committee, pp. 1 and 2.

sidered the rubrics as far as they were affected by the "Uniformity Acts Amendment Act," and by the fourth report of the Commissioners. The discussion on that occasion turned principally upon the Athanasian Creed, and not at all upon the Ornaments Rubric. In the present year no steps have been taken by either House of Convocation to discuss the question, beyond the appointment of Committees in the Southern Province to report next year. It therefore becomes the duty of such an assembly as this to assist in forming the public opinion of the Clergy and Laity, and by its informal utterances to ventilate the subject before the meeting of Convocation. There are some, no doubt, who, like the Committee of Convocation, would leave the Rubrics untouched, and allow the controverted points to be settled by the decision of the new court under the Public Worship Regulation Act. Others think a liberal discretion should be given to the Bishop, which certainly would be desirable, whether they are revised or not. Others, again, fear that if the Rubrics are altered the alteration of the Prayer Book will follow, and that opinions are so divided that if any changes are made they will tend to narrow it. I certainly should not be in favour of any revision of the Rubrics which would assail the integrity of the Prayer Book, as is shadowed forth by the questions of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Clergy, in which he alludes to the proposition that the concession of the eastward position should be balanced by the omission of the Athanasian Creed and the Communion Service. On the other hand, the great outcry from the Clergy against the Bill of last Session was that it was brought forward without time being given Convocation to revise the laws of the Church. That opportunity is now given them. I cannot see how the argument of the Bishop of Peterborough can be refuted, viz., that before the Rubrics can be enforced they must be brought in harmony with the feeling of the times. He says the real root of the evil "is that we have been governed, or rather we are attempting to govern, the Church of England by obsolete laws—the laws of the

Church were passed more than two hundred years ago—the Rubrics of the Church having been framed for a state of things existing two hundred years ago, will not fit the present state of the country. The consequence has been that the Clergy have long been obliged to set aside the Rubrics here and there, with what I call the unwise connivance of the Bishops.”* I will, therefore, assume that it is desirable that some alterations which should make as little change as possible in the existing practice, should be made before July next, in order that the peace of the Church may not be disturbed by constant litigation, with which we are threatened under the Act of last Session. I propose, first, to lay down the principles by which the revision of the Rubrics should be guided.

1. The maintenance of Primitive faith and Catholic practice. Our Church has always maintained its direct succession from the Apostles, and, as the 30th canon declares, “Doth with reverence maintain those ceremonies which do neither endamage the Church of God, nor offend the minds of sober men; and only departed from them in those particular points wherein they were fallen both from themselves and their ancient integrity, and from the Apostolical Churches, which were their first founders.”

2. The comprehensive character of the Church. This feeling is embodied in the Prayer Book, which itself is the result of a compromise. It is Catholic in its reverence for all that is of Primitive usage, and Protestant in its rejection of all the errors which have crept into both the doctrine and ritual of the Church of Rome.

3. Due respect to be paid to the customs of the Church for the last two hundred years. The minds of congregations should not be disturbed by innovations in ritual, nor practices forced upon them which have not been in common use, and are repugnant to their feelings.

* Speech of Bishop of Peterborough in the House of Lords, on the Public Worship Regulation Bill 1874.

4. In non-essentials, where different usages exist, alternative forms should be defined and allowed subject to the discretion of the ordinary. They must not be left to the congregation, or all uniformity would be lost; nor to the clergyman, for he might enforce views distasteful to his congregation; but to the Bishop, who is the best judge between the two, and who would, under the pressure of public opinion, be guided in his decision mainly by the wishes of the large majority of the congregation.

Before discussing the Rubrics in detail, I will first of all remind you of what is their history. They date from the first Common Prayer Book of Edward VI., which was drawn up under Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, and, being revised and approved by the Archbishops, Bishops, and Clergy in both Convocations, was confirmed by both Houses of Parliament and the Crown in 1548-9. About 1550 some exception was taken to the Prayer Book, and under the influence of some foreign Reformers some rites and ceremonies were removed, such as the use of oil in baptism, the unction of the sick, prayers for the departed, the Invocation of the Holy Ghost in the prayer of consecration, and the Rubric which ordered the mixing of the water with the wine in the Eucharist. The Commissioners appointed to revise the Prayer Book also made some other alterations, and the vestments prescribed by the former book were ordered to be set aside. This second Prayer Book of Edward VI. was annexed to the Bill for the Uniformity of Divine Worship, and passed by both Houses of Parliament in 1552. In the first year of Queen Mary, 1553, the first and second Liturgies of Edward VI. were repealed by statute. At the accession of Elizabeth the Act of repeal passed under Mary was reversed, and the second book of Edward VI. adopted, with some alterations in the Communion Service, and in the Rubric concerning the state of the chancel, and the proper place for reading the Divine Service, and the vestments of the first book of Edward VI. were restored. In the first year of James I., after the Conference at Hampton Court, between Whitgift and

other Divines on the one side, and Dr. Reynolds and some Puritans on the other, a few alterations were made. After that there was no further change till 1661-2, when the Prayer Book assumed its present form. Its admirable preface lays down the principles on which it was drawn up,* “not to gratify this or that party in any of their unreasonable demands, but to do that which to our best understandings we conceive might most tend to the preservation of peace and the unity of the Church, the procuring of reverence, and exciting of piety and devotion in the public worship of God, and the cutting off occasion from them that seek occasion to cavil or quarrel against the Liturgy of the Church.”

I will now allude to those Rubrics that are doubtful and seem to require a clearer definition. The most important of these is the Ornaments Rubric taken from the Act of Uniformity of Elizabeth. It is in conflict, as recently interpreted, with the 58th Canon of 1604, which is as follows: “Every minister saying the public prayers, or ministering the Sacraments or other rites of the Church, shall wear a decent and comely surplice with sleeves, graduates hoods, and non-graduates black tippets.” Dr. Travers Twiss suggests that the Rubric should be omitted, and the vesture of the parochial clergy should be regulated by the canon.† Mr. Hubbard says that the offensive feature in the revived vestments was their colour; and restraint in respect of colour might have been exercised by the following addition to the Ornaments Rubric: “Nevertheless it is expedient that for the greater uniformity in ecclesiastical vestments the ministers shall be restrained to the use of a white vesture, provided that upon such vesture they may wear a scarf or stole, and, if graduates, an academic hood.”‡ Lord Carnarvon recommends§ “the substitution, in the case of all parochial churches, or churches of a parochial character, of the surplice for all other

* Preface to the Prayer Book, 1662.

† Fourth Report of the Ritual Commissioners, p. 14.

‡ Fourth Report of the Ritual Commissioners, p. 15.

§ Fourth Report of the Ritual Commissioners, Appendix, p. 156.

ecclesiastical vestments during all the services, subject to a distinct discretion on the part of the Ordinary to sanction the addition of some other white vestment during the Holy Communion, or, on the other hand, the use of the black gown during the sermon, when in either case he was satisfied that the congregation desired it." Mr. Perry goes further, and suggests that the Ornaments Rubric should be left as it is, with this addition, "but if any question arise in a parish or congregation touching the fitness of the ornaments of this second year, or of any other ornaments used at such times of ministration, it shall be decided by the discretion of the Ordinary, or of the Archbishop, in case of appeal being made to him."* The opinions I have just quoted are those of different members of the Ritual Commission. The question of vestments depends so much more on custom, which varies with different times, than on any abstract fitness, that some slight variation in them which would not include the elaborate vestment generally, but by no means necessarily, connected with the Roman ritual, seems requisite to meet the views of those two great parties which will always exist in the Church, as the foundation of their differences is in human nature itself. The practice certainly of the Church of England has been to beautify the House of God, "Keeping the middle way between superstition and slovenliness," and to avoid as much as possible that personal ornament which tends to magnify the importance of a sacerdotal class, without giving up such a decent and distinctive dress for its ministers as seems to be sanctioned by Catholic antiquity. This led to the maintenance of the cope for the celebrant in the Cathedral, and the peculiar dress of bishops. The importance of this question, as well as the position of the celebrant, to which I will next allude, has been much exaggerated, because the advocacy of one side or the other has been made the rallying point of party feeling. The Rubric in the Communion service respecting the position

* Fourth Report of the Ritual Commissioners, p. 22.

of the celebrant standing before the Holy Table has been decided to mean on the north side, but there appears to be no reason why an alternative position should not be allowed. The Rubrics recognise two positions of the Communion Table as equally lawful; besides the usual position, it may stand in the body of the Church, tablewise, when the broad side would be to the north. This was the practice in most parish churches during the seventeenth century. As far as the positions may be symbolical of doctrine, it seems to be capable of interpretation to suit both High and Low Church views.* Bishop Wordsworth says, "Each of these two positions has its own special significance—the one represents the Divine grace and gift to man, the other expresses man's plea for mercy and acceptance with God; one looks manward from God, the other Godward from man." The American Church admits both positions. In a basilican arrangement, the earliest of all, where the Bishop and Presbyters sat at the east end, the celebrant stood on the east side. The Church of Rome recognises both an eastward and westward position, so that the eastward position cannot be said to be exclusively Roman. The Scotch Office Rubric, before the prayer of consecration, says "He shall stand at such part of the Holy Table, where he may with more ease and decency use both his hands."

I now come to those Rubrics that are obsolete or irregularly obeyed, which I touch briefly.

(1.) The first and second paragraphs in the Rubrics preceding the office of the Holy Communion, which owing to their strictness are never carried out. It has been proposed to abolish the required notice, to make the second clause more general, and to relieve the Bishop from the duty of proceeding against the offending person according to canon.

(2.) Reading the daily prayers in the Church. This is a Rubric which I think has, unfortunately, been too often broken by omission, and it should be enforced subject to the discretion of

* Letter of the Bishop of Lincoln in *John Bull*, May 9, 1874.

the Ordinary. I cannot but think that the note by the Ritual Commissioners* lowers the standard of duty, and, now that short services are sanctioned, I think that nothing but reasonable hindrances ought to prevent the daily prayers being said, if not twice, yet once a day.

(3.) Instruction in the Catechism after the second lesson of evening prayer. This might be used either before or after service instead of a sermon as a valuable instruction even to the older members of the congregation.

There are others more or less repugnant to the spirit and feeling of the times.

1. The Sponsors' Rubric. It was recommended by the Ritual Commission that one sponsor should suffice, and that parents might be sponsors for their own children.

2. The individual administration of the holy elements of the Eucharist, against the relaxation of which by the Ritual Commissioners, without confining the indulgence to cases of extreme necessity, † our Bishop entered a protest, with which I entirely agree.

3. The Rubrics preceding the Creed commonly called the Athanasian. I do not here enter into the question of the revision of the text of the Creed, because that is not affected by the Rubrics; but I wish briefly to refer to the question of omitting this Creed entirely from the services of the Church, or of qualifying the damnatory clauses by a note of interpretation, such as at the end of the Baptismal Service explains the sign of the cross in baptism. I will not say more than that I must enter my protest against any alteration of it, which would be a blow to all dogmatic teaching, and shake that belief in the Trinity which is assailed by some of our cleverest writers, such as when in the same volume of a review which contains the eloquent defence of Ritual by the late Prime Minister, the son of Dr. Arnold describes the Holy Trinity as "a trio of magnified

* Schedule to the Fourth Report, p. 5.

† Fourth Report, pp. 11 and 12.

and non-natural men," and popular Christianity as "a fairy tale."* Difficulties there may be in the general understanding of such a Creed, and it may be a stumbling-block to many; but though I express an opinion, as a layman with diffidence, it does not seem to me to require any other interpretation than S. Mark, xvi. 16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not, shall be damned," or *κατακριθήσεται*, condemned, together with the Sixth Article, "Anything which is not read in Scripture, nor may be proved thereby, is not required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."

4. Lastly, there are many customs which are not according to the Rubric, but in order that no irregularities may creep in it is wise to sanction them—such as the prayer before the sermon, though the canon prescribes the bidding prayer—the turning to the east during the Creed—the use of hymns in different parts of the service.

Having alluded to some of the principal points at issue, I will now consider what difficulties stand in the way of Convocation coming to an agreement on the subject. An extreme party has arisen, who "say that they are bound by the traditions of the Catholic Church, and that they ought to obey the unwritten instinct of the Catholic Church rather than the written law of the English Church;"† who are not satisfied with the compromise entered into at the Reformation, and wish in their ritual to go back to pre-Reformational usages. These it is impossible to satisfy. There are also those who believe that they are carrying out the law strictly by reviving certain obsolete usage or forms sanctioned by the Church of England. To those I would say, Do not imperil doctrines of vital importance by making your stand on external ordinances.

* Contemporary Review, p. 802, 1874.

† Speech of the Bishop of Peterborough in the House of Lords, on the Public Worship Regulation Bill.

High sacramental views have been and probably are now held by those who do not violate the Rubrics, nor use an exceptional ritual. There are also those who are open to the charge of omitting to do what the Rubrics enjoin. I would ask each of these great parties in the Church to consider whether their own particular views are of such importance that they would prefer to break up the Church of England into sects rather than give way. I hope that they will each be prepared, on approaching this question, to make some sacrifices, and to find out what are the essential points on which they agree, rather than the non-essentials on which they may agree to differ. I would further say to those of the clergy who are dissatisfied with the legislation of the last session, which they call Erastian, and in order to avoid the interference of Parliament are beginning to agitate for the severance of Church and State: Take warning from the Irish Church. Do not imagine that you will have greater independence when disestablished than you have now. Do not let the idea of Congregationalism, which has been dangled before our eyes both in Parliament and in print by a great master of eloquent language, induce you to forget that you would then be the slave of your congregation, instead of being bound by Rubrics and Acts of Uniformity; and, if the congregations are to dictate the ritual, what is to prevent them from dictating the doctrines also? Next, what is the body to whom the revision of the Rubrics is entrusted? There is no unity of action between the two Synods of York and Canterbury. The Northern Convocation has not yet appointed a Committee to consider the subject. The Southern Convocation at least imperfectly represents the clergy and demands reform. Its system of election is defective, but it supplies, like the unreformed Parliament, many distinguished and representative men. If they will only study the signs of the times they will not disregard the public opinion of the laity of the Church, and I am happy to see that Bishops are already asking for an expression of that opinion from ruridecanal conferences and chapters.

Suggestions have been made at the Oxford Conference that the Archbishop should summon lay delegates from every diocese for the purpose of consultation with Convocation. I cannot think such a course either desirable or constitutional, because they would interfere with the rights of Convocation as representing the clergy, and their opinion could have no legal value or authority. I should have thought the debates of last Session would have shown Convocation sufficiently the feeling of the two Houses of Parliament. It is perhaps unnecessary to forecast what may be the decision of Convocation, but, whatever it may be, any revision of the Rubrics proposed by it must come before Parliament, which can either accept, reject, or modify it. I think the best course, to sift the matter more carefully than could be done in committee of the whole House, would be that the Bill for the Revision of the Rubrics should be referred at once, or after a formal second reading, to a joint committee of both Houses of Parliament, formed of Churchmen exclusively. This Committee should be composed of at least fifty members, to include men of all shades of opinion; and any agreement to which they might come would command the respect of the great majority of both Houses of Parliament. Their decision would probably be accepted by all but those who look upon all interference by a Parliament no longer composed exclusively of Churchmen with jealousy and distrust; and I believe that if the Rubrics revised by Convocation and Parliament received the sanction of the Crown they would be obeyed loyally by the great body of the clergy as the law of the land and the Church. I commend this question to this Conference with the full sense that I have not done due justice to it, but if in any way I may have been able to say words which will lead to a temperate discussion of it I shall feel that I have not spoken in vain. I have attempted to advocate a certain amount of elasticity in our ritual, limited not by the caprice of congregations but by the wise discretion of the Bishops, which is no new principle, as it is already indicated in our Prayer Book. The Church

of England, if it is to continue a national Church, must be comprehensive both in its doctrines and ritual, and I would rather the Rubrics should be left in their present unsatisfactory state than that in their revision the compromise effected at the Reformation should be overthrown. I ask you to consider your determination in no narrow or intolerant spirit, or with a view to give a temporary triumph to any party, but to aid in settling this long-vexed question, to the greater strength and profit of the Church, and thereby to the maintenance of truly Protestant and Apostolic faith among the people of England.





