

The Permissive Use of the Vestments.

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BY the courtesy of the Editors I am allowed the opportunity of trying to explain somewhat more clearly than I have at present succeeded in doing why I am an advocate of a permissive use of the Eucharistic vestments. I am in entire agreement with the writer of the "Month" in the January number of the *CHURCHMAN* when he asserts that there is a party in the Church of England which is working for a Counter-Reformation; but I cannot draw his conclusion that a toleration of the vestments would help that movement forward. I believe it would have the opposite effect. The Counter-Reformation party is at present a small one, though well organized and led, and it is certainly very active in the Press. It is clever enough to speak always in the name of the "Church of England," as though there were no other legitimate view except its own; and most persons have something better to do than to expose its pretensions. But nothing would tend so certainly to throw the moderate High Churchman into the arms of these extremists as the definite refusal, when the issue is fairly raised, to allow him what he has all his life considered as a legitimate privilege. At present the two parties are divided in policy. Speaking roughly, the leading High Churchmen are on the side of Prayer-Book revision, the Counter-Reformation man is against it. That difference means something, and readers of the *CHURCHMAN* should note the fact and seek for the explanation.

I agree, further, with the writer I have quoted in the opinion that the vestments are not desired by anybody on any mere ground of sentiment, much less because they are supposed to be altogether without significance. The Report of the Committee of the Canterbury Upper House upon the Significance of the Vestments is frequently misrepresented. The learned Bishops who made that Report did not decide that the vestments had no

significance, but that they had none *in themselves*. Consequently, their significance has to be determined by their use. The greater number of those who use—or wish to use—they take, I believe, the view expressed by Cranmer in the First Prayer-Book of the Reformed Church, that they are the “vesture appointed for the ministration” of Holy Communion; and I would urge that this is their true and only necessary significance. They form the historical dress of the minister in that celebration. If this be so, the symbolism attached to them, if any, will vary according to the particular doctrine of the Eucharist held by those who wear them: it may be Roman, or it may be Lutheran, or, again, it may be Anglican of any school. For unless it can be shown that the sacramental doctrine of the Church in England has not varied since this “vesture” was first worn in our island, there is no particular view of Eucharistic doctrine which the vestments, as used here, can be held to imply.

It is sometimes argued that as long as the use of the surplice—and the surplice alone—is authoritatively sanctioned in the Church of England we have a security for the maintenance of the Evangelical position. One wonders sometimes at the shortness of controversial memories. How long is it since the use of a surplice in the pulpit, instead of the accustomed black gown, was regarded as the very negation of Evangelical doctrine? Within living memory a surplice upon a choirman has been known to rouse as much blind fury as to-day is roused in some quarters by an alb upon a server. There is, in fact, no inherent Evangelical significance in a surplice. The Puritans with whom Hooker contended did not distinguish between the surplice and other vestments, and rightly, because they were equally in use in the Roman Church; all belonged to the “leaven of Antichrist.” Hooker quotes Cartwright as saying that “Popish apparel, *the surplice especially*, hath been by Papists abominably abused; that it hath been a very sacrament of abomination; and that, remaining, it serveth as a monument of idolatry.” If, then, we have ceased to find the surplice “dangerous” and “scandalous,” is it not time that we ceased to apply these

epithets to the other vestments? Obviously the best way to empty these vestments of any "scandalous" significance would be to adopt them universally, as the surplice has been adopted—and this may come in time—but even now it ought to be conceded that the Evangelical position can neither be secured by a surplice nor imperilled by a "vestment or cope."

A further argument against any implication of Papistical doctrine in the Eucharistic vestments may be drawn from the attitude of the Caroline revisers of the Prayer-Book in 1662. No English Churchmen can with less justice be accused of Romanizing tendencies. Their leader, Bishop Cosin, whose influence can be traced in the entire revision, was so anti-Roman in sympathy that he disinherited his only son for joining that communion; and it is significant that to-day the party of the Counter-Reformation speak of him with scant respect.

But these revisers, in reinserting the Elizabethan Ornaments Rubric, did not repeat the reference to the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity, which is generally supposed to have overridden it; and if, in so doing, they did not look forward to a time when the ancient vestments should be revived, their conduct is inexplicable. It has been suggested, for example, that, as the Edwardine books were scarce, the revisers may not have known what vestments they were prescribing—a remarkable suggestion, considering the fact that Cosin's "Notes on the Prayer-Book" survive, and have long been accessible in print. Or, again, we are told that it is impossible to imagine that the framers of the 1662 rubric intended to impose upon the clergy the obligation of wearing the Edwardine vestments, for the simple reason that they took no pains to enforce it. So far, I should agree. But when it is further argued that between "imposing" and "forbidding" there is no middle way, it is forgotten that the rubrics were drawn up, not by lawyers, but by divines, who might wish not to lower what they considered the ideal standard, though they were content in practice with something less. This certainly was Cosin's view of the state of things in Charles I.'s reign. In one of his collections, upon

the words "such ornaments as were in use in the second year of King Edward VI.," he notes as follows :

"In that year, by the authority of Parliament, was this order set forth, in the end of the service-book then appointed. At Morning and Evening Prayer, the administration of baptism, the burial of the dead, etc., in parish churches, the minister shall put upon him a surplice; in cathedral and collegiate churches, and in colleges, the archdeacons, deans, presidents, and masters may use the ornaments also belonging to their degrees and dignities. But in all other places it shall be free for them whether they will use any surplice or not. The Bishop administering the Lord's Supper, and celebrating the Sacraments, shall wear a rochet or alb, with a cope or vestment; and he shall have also his pastoral staff. And before the Communion, upon the day appointed for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the priest having on him an alb, with a vestment or cope, shall stand at the altar, and where there be many priests and deacons, so many of them as be needful shall help the chief minister, having albs or tunicles upon them.

"These ornaments and vestures of the ministers were so displeasing to Calvin and Bucer, that the one in his letters to the Protector, and the other in his censure of the liturgy, sent to Archbishop Cranmer, urged very vehemently to have them taken away, not thinking it tolerable that we should have anything common with the Papists, but show forth our Christian liberty in the simplicity of the Gospel.

"Hereupon, when a Parliament was called in the fifth year of King Edward, they altered the former book, and made another order for vestments, copes, and albs not to be worn at all; allowing an Archbishop and a Bishop a rochet only, and a priest or deacon to wear nothing but a surplice.

"But by the Act of Uniformity [*i.e.*, 1559] the Parliament thought fit not to continue this last order, but to restore the first again; which since that time was never altered by any other law, and therefore it is still in force at this day. And both Bishops, priests, and deacons, that knowingly and wilfully break this order, are as hardly censured in the Preface to this book concerning ceremonies as ever Calvin or Bucer censured the ceremonies themselves."¹

In another place, on the words "as were in use," he says :

"And then were in use, not a surplice and hood, as we now use, but a plain white alb with a vestment or cope over it. And therefore, according to this rubric, *are we still bound* to wear albs and vestments, as have been so long time worn in the Church of God, *however it is neglected.*"²

I quote these passages partly for their value in showing what Cosin probably had in mind in drafting the present Ornaments Rubric, but more especially because they show that the man whom Fuller called "the Atlas of the Protestant religion" desired the use of the Eucharistic vestments in the

¹ Cosin's Works, vol. v., p. 439.

² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

English Church, and did not regard them as significant of Roman doctrine. His words "as have been so long time worn in the Church of God" give exactly the plea for the retention of the ancient vestments in the Church of England as it presents itself to the minds of most High Churchmen to-day.

My last reason for wishing for a permissive use is a very practical one. The use is desired by large numbers of faithful and loyal Churchmen. In some 1,500 churches it has already been adopted. Of course, it will be said that to condone disobedience in one case is to provoke it in others. I do not think the maxim applies in this particular case, because the circumstances are exceptional. There have been judgments given by the highest Court both for and against the High Church reading of the Ornaments Rubric. On the one side there are the decisions in *Liddell v. Westerton* and *Martin v. Mackonochie*, and on the other, those in *Hebbert v. Purchas* and *Clifton v. Ridsdale*. And though in the *Ridsdale* case the Court was a strong one, yet it was not unanimous; and the opinion is largely held that if the question of the vestments had been argued over again in the Bishop of Lincoln's case, the Privy Council might have reversed its judgment on that, as on other ceremonial points. There seems, then, at the present moment an opportunity for removing a "stone of stumbling" from the path of Christian brotherhood in the Church of England, of which all who love peace should take advantage. I would only add one thing more. If the Evangelical party cannot agree to allow the policy of a maximum and minimum use, have they an alternative policy for getting back to a condition of law and order in the Church? Do they expect to convince the High Churchmen, or do they propose to prosecute them?

