

## THE POSITION OF THE MINISTER AT THE LORD'S TABLE.

BY ALBERT MITCHELL

THERE are three possible positions for the Minister who at the Table of the Lord celebrates the most comfortable Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ our Saviour. The first is *behind* the Table. This position by agreement of East and West in the preservation of tradition was the primitive Use. It appears to have been universal in the earliest and purest days of the Church; it continued the normal or authoritative use down to the eleventh or twelfth century at least—perhaps later; and it has (in places) been maintained in unbroken continuity to the present day. The second is *before* the Table. This innovation is of unknown date, but may be as old as the fifth century. It never at any time became universal in the Church; but for three centuries, the thirteenth to the sixteenth, it was the prevailing (but not exclusive) use of western Christendom at the least; and it is still the normal (but not exclusive) use of unreformed Christendom. The third is *at the side of* the Table. This use (although there is suggestion of it earlier) appears to be peculiar to the English Church since the Reformation. So stated, it will be seen that to the careful liturgical and historical student the use of the term “end” to represent any Use is to be deprecated. The distinction is and always must be (to the student) between standing “behind” or “before” or “at the side of” the Table. In practice, the position “at the side of” the Table is limited to the *North* side, as prescribed in 1552 and 1662; although the *South* side may have been experimented with between 1549 and 1552.

For evidence I will go first to the historic church of Saint Clement, near the Lateran. Here underneath the existing basilica is the older church of the fourth century, almost intact, with its frescoes (not later than the ninth century). According to tradition, the church of Saint Clement is one of the oldest Christian centres in Rome, and it has been generally identified with the site of the house of Clement. This identification is partly based on the fact that under the apse of the fourth-century church is the atrium or principal room of a first-century Roman house, while under that again are the ruins of a building of the time of Republican Rome, about 200 B.C. To-day there are, by reason of the steady rise in the ground level of Rome, the remains of four buildings one upon another. The first-century house, the traditional meeting-place of the Church of the Romans to whom St. Paul wrote, was raised upon the walls of the older house. In the fourth century, when the peace of the church made possible proper church building, a large basilica was built over “the house of Clement,” and continued in use probably until the sack of Rome by Robert Guiscard in 1084. After the site was reoccupied, the present stately church (smaller than the earlier one) was built over the older church, and the beautiful

marble fittings of the choir (believed to date from the early sixth century) brought up into it. This upper church is reasonably dated from 1099, as Pascal II was elected that year at a conclave in "S. Clemente." The old (or under) church was in use as late as 1059, as appears from an inscription; while the newer church was in use, according to another inscription, in 1125. The newer church repeated the general arrangements of the older church, except that it was narrower, the North outer wall of the new church being built on the North aisle arches of the older church: as a consequence the Western apse was about half the size of the apse of the under church. To support this a new apsidal foundation was necessarily constructed to the lower church, so there are two apses intersecting. The marble choir fittings, including the pulpits, or ambone, were taken upstairs; but a new baldaquin,<sup>1</sup> or canopy, was erected by Pope Paschal in the upper church; and although the present Table is not original (having been reconsecrated in 1868, at the same time the existing Table was placed on the old site below), it is in the original position. The (eleventh century) arrangement is such that the "back-to-people" position, "before" the Table, is physically impossible, as the floor drops sheer in front, and the steps ascend at the side. (See plans and sections in Nolan's *Basilica of S. Clemente* [Roma: Tipografia Cuggiani, 1910], pp. 4, 9, 103; also Baedeker's *Central Italy*.) While the actual Table and baldaquin in the lower church date only from 1868, they correspond to the tradition: and when used on S. Clement's Day the position behind the Table (as I ascertained by inquiry on the spot) is adopted.

In the lower church are several fine frescoes not later than the ninth century. The most important of these represents St. Clement celebrating the Sacrament (Nolan, p. 181). Clement stands behind the Table, with a group of two bishops and deacon and sub-deacon behind him in the apse, and the rest of the congregation in front of the Table in the Nave. The painter, with the true medieval disdain for perspective that characterizes so many old pictures, depicts all the people (including the celebrant) full face looking towards the spectators, and also imposes the small size votive figures of the donors: but the book (open at the *Dominus vobiscum*, which the saint is pronouncing with extended hands) and chalice and paten are carefully placed. The Dominican lay brother, a charming Irish gentleman, who was my guide, carefully explained that "In St. Clement's day it was customary to celebrate Mass facing the people." Less direct evidence is afforded by another of the frescoes repre-

<sup>1</sup>Baldaquin, or baldachino, is derived from Baldacco, the Italian of Bagdad, and originally meant the fine silk there made which was used for "altar" veils. These were hung from four posts round the "altar," drawn across while non-communicants were present, but drawn back when they retired and only the "faithful" remained. (Hence the "Prayer of the Veil.") Afterwards a roof was placed on the four posts to protect the vessels, and the whole structure called baldaquin or baldaquino; and when it was made in the shape of a cup the structure was called Ciborium. The use of the term Ciborium for a closed vessel (as distinct from the open monstrance) to hold the Elements is of much later origin.

sending the translation of the relics of St. Clement in 867 (Nolan, p. 129). Here the pope stands under the baldaquin behind the Table looking towards the spectators, with the book open in front of him at the words *Pax Domini sit semper*, which indicates a celebration: but the fresco is imperfect and the architectural details cannot be certainly recognized, while the grouping is a little perplexing. But the evidence of both frescoes is that the celebrant faced the people.

The evidence of St. Clement's is, therefore, that down to the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century the only position contemplated for the minister at the Lord's Table was that behind the Table, facing the people.

The recognition of this fact presents no difficulty at Rome, as this position is still retained at Rome not only at S. Clemente, but at all "patriarchal" celebrations (as, I understand, is also the case in the provinces). At St. Paul-without-the-walls (as well as at other basilicas) the "high altar" is a great square Table, with a row of candles across the middle. At the "patriarchal" celebrations the priest stands behind, and faces the people; at ordinary celebrations he stands before, with back to people; and this at precisely the same Table. It is interesting to note that at St. Paul-without-the-walls the apse is at the Eastern end of the basilica, and not at the West, as more usual.

Mr. Geo. Gilbert Scott (who left the communion of the English Church for that of the Roman obedience) says that in seventeen churches at Rome with western sanctuaries the priest still faces the people, as well as in two with eastern sanctuaries (other than St. Paul's), and he also adduces evidence of the same practice in some Eastern churches. He mentions that the same practice is retained at the western sanctuary in the cathedral at Naumberg in Hesse, although the back-to-people position obtains in the eastern choir of the same church. He believes the double use to have obtained at the famous Abbey of St. Gall. Mr. Scott indeed attempts to argue that the priest was originally invisible to the people because of the veils that Mr. Scott regards as being drawn: but this contention would appear to be negatived by the words of the Roman rubric (below referred to), *Ostendit populo*. It would seem that the veils were drawn aside when those not entitled to communicate had retired. (See *The Liturgy and the Eastward Position*, by J. T. Tomlinson—a valuable mine of information.)

At the old Vatican basilica of St. Peter, which subsisted till the fifteenth century, when it was demolished to make room for the creation of Michelangelo, the "high altar" was so placed that the position before the Table was physically impossible. In front of the Table there was a sheer drop (as still at St. Clement's), with an ascent of seven steps up to each side of the Table. And according to the ground plan shown in Scott's book (cited below), no less than eleven of the subsidiary "altars" were also arranged for the celebrant to stand behind the Table, and these the most important: although the plan also shows others where such a position is excluded.

The evidence I have adduced from Rome does not stand alone. I will take our own English church at Canterbury. The cathedral, or more precisely Metropolitan, church established by Augustine, and dedicated to the Holy Trinity, had its apse at the West end, and the Lord's Table arranged for the minister to face towards the people. Later, a new addition was built at the East end for the use of the convent, and here the new-fashioned practice of celebrating with back to the people seems to have been adopted; but the Archiepiscopal Chair still remained in the Western apse, and the people still worshipped about the older Table, although it had come to be called the "Mary-altar." Eadmer, the precentor, describing this church before the fire of 1067, wrote: "When the priest celebrated the Divine mysteries at this (i.e., the Western) altar, he was face to the people, who were standing down the church, while he looked Eastward." (*Ad hoc altare cum sacerdos ageret divina mysteria, faciem ad populum, qui deorsum stabat, at orientem versam habebat.*)<sup>1</sup>

After the fire Lanfranc rebuilt the church, re-dedicating it as Christ Church, and abolished the Western "altar." Nevertheless, in the arrangement of the newer choir some reminiscence of the old tradition lingered, as the Archiepiscopal Chair was placed behind the "altar." The same was done by Herbert with his episcopal chair at Norwich, where all was arranged for the face-to-people position. But I do not know of any definite evidence of its use. At Canterbury the arrangement was displaced early in the nineteenth century: at Norwich it still remains.

We are not limited to architectural evidence. We can learn something by comparing the rubrics of the Roman *Ordo Missae* and the Sarum *Ordo*. The crucial rubric is that which immediately follows the pronouncing of the fateful words, "*Hoc est enim corpus meum*" (for this is My Body). The Roman rubric runs: "Having pronounced the words of consecration, immediately bending the knee, he adores the consecrated Host: he rises, shows it to the people, replaces it upon the corporal, again adores: and he does not disjoin his thumbs and forefingers, except when the Host is to be handled, until the ablution of the fingers." Similarly, in regard to the chalice, the same words occur: "*Genuflexus adorat, surgit, ostendit populo,*" adding "*deponit, cooperit, et iterum adorat.*" [He puts it down, covers it, and again adores.] Now, this precise statement of action shows that all the while he is face towards the people, so that he simply has to rise from his knees to "Show it to the people." There is no provision for any change of front. How different from the Sarum rubric, where the priest has his back to the people, which runs: "After these words let the priest incline himself toward the Host, and afterwards raise it above his forehead so that it may be seen by the people; and reverently replace it in front of the chalice in the manner of a cross made with the same." Here, it will be noticed, it cannot be seen by the people unless he raise it

<sup>1</sup> See plan in George Gilbert Scott's Essay on *The History of English Church Architecture*, facing page 58.

*supra frontem*. So at the time the Roman rubric was framed, the minister was behind the Table, face to people: but when the Sarum rubric was made the position had changed. Osmund, to whom is attributed the first form of the Sarum Order, became bishop of Sarum about 1085. Incidentally, we may see (as I said above), from the words *Ostendit populo* (he shows it to the people) in the Roman rubric that the attempt of some to avoid the evidence by alleging that the whole action was behind the "veil" is vain.

It is interesting to note that in the Ambrosian Rite, which once prevailed in the whole province of Milan (then extending far north of the Alps), but is now confined to the diocese of Milan, the rubric for the "elevation" of the host agrees with the Sarum rubric, but the rubric for "showing" the cup to the people follows the older Roman form. This would appear to indicate that the change of use at Milan was after the rise of the heresy of concomitance and the relegation of the cup to the background in popular estimation. This would probably bring us to the twelfth or thirteenth century, and so agree with our other evidence.

At Milan the "altar" stands clear, and the deacon, after censuring the celebrant, "goes round, censuring behind the altar, and coming to the gospel-corner makes the sign of the Cross over the corner of the altar in front with the censer." This is another evidence of the older Use.

The rubrics of the other independent Western use, the Mozarabic, prescribe the back-to-people position. But the Rev. T. J. Pulvertaft, in his valuable article in the *CHURCHMAN* of February, 1904, shows that these rubrics date only from the end of the fifteenth century at earliest, and that the evidence is overwhelming that the service books were without written or printed rubrics until about 1485. What was the use of the Mozarabs (the Christians who lived under Muslim rule and had limited intercourse with Rome)? Mr. Pulvertaft believes that their Use was to stand behind the Table facing the people. I refer to that article (which I hope may be reprinted) for the evidence: but it includes the Canons of the Council of Toledo in 633; the architectural arrangements of the Spanish churches, where the central tower is called the *Cimborio* (showing that it covered the "high altar," between the presbytery and the choir); and the express statement of Cardinal Lorenzana in 1770 (in explanation of the fact that the sole rubric *vertat se ad populum* in the present Mozarabic Rite is associated with the benediction) that "The principal reason for this is the antiquity of the Mozarabic Rite, for in the first ages of the Church the altar was placed towards the faithful and the priest looked at the people, wherefore it was not necessary for him to turn when he saluted, as it is necessary to-day, for the people stand behind." Mr. Pulvertaft also refers to evidence in Spanish America that shows that the "face-to-people" Use was carried there at the colonisation by the Spaniards, a significant instance of the late survival (or at least tradition), of this primitive Use in Spain itself. The Mozarabic Use

was discouraged as the Moorish regions passed under Castilian rule and, consequently, Roman influence.

If we turn to the East,<sup>1</sup> the most valuable Liturgy is the Clementine, preserved in the so-called Apostolic Constitutions, and possibly to be dated in the third or fourth century. As this Liturgy fell out of use in time, it is rather more free of suspicion of interpolation than those liturgies which are preserved only in manuscripts of fourteenth or even later centuries. The Clementine rubric is most elaborate, describing the bishop (termed the high priest; cf. Cyprian's usage) standing at the Table with "the presbyters on his right hand and on his left as disciples present with their teacher," an obvious likening of the action of the celebrant to that of the Master Himself; and the whole prescribed action requires that he is behind the Table facing the people. The rubric proceeds: "Let two deacons on each part (i.e. side) of the altar hold a small bellows of fine parchment or peacock's feathers or linen and gently keep off the little flying creatures lest they defile the vessels." There is no change of the position of the bishop for prayer, blessing, the *Sursum Corda*, or the consecration. In the Liturgy of St. James (oldest MS. of fourteenth century) there is no hint of change of position between address to the people and address to God. The Liturgy of the Syrian Jacobites exists to-day in translation only, and that only from 1572, but that also has no hint of change of position. The Deacon goes all round the "altar," censing East, West, North, and South. For the communion the translator uses the expression "comes down in front of the altar and bowing before the Table of life," and after the ministration he "ascends the steps." On the whole this supports a presumption of the "behind-the-table" Use. There is no rubric in the Liturgy of St. Mark (1583), which may remind us of the old Mozarabic. The Abyssinian and Nestorian rubrics appear to contemplate the back-to-people position, but both are late, the former dating only from 1670. The Nestorian rubrics speak of "those within the altar" and "the door of the altar,"<sup>2</sup> and the priest "worships towards the four sides of the bema." In the Coptic Rite (thirteenth century) there are ambiguous references to "the front of the altar" and to "facing west"; but the Armenian Rite, while containing references to "turning to the people," speaks also of the deacons "going round the altar" to offer the Gospel book to the people to kiss: and again going to the "right side" of the Table and then to the "left side" to proclaim; and the Sahidic Rite (Upper Egypt) follows the Clementine almost word for word. The overwhelming balance of the Eastern evidence, so far as I can follow it, is therefore in agreement with the Western tradition.

Taking the East with the West, the conclusion that appears to me indisputable is that the universal primitive Christian Use was for the Minister-Celebrant to stand behind the Table facing the people throughout the action of the Rite: that this Use continued the more

<sup>1</sup> In the Greek Church the Bishop's seat is behind the Holy Table.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Westcott's note, "On the history of the word *θυσιαστήριον*," *Hebrews*, p. 453.

general until the eleventh or twelfth centuries, but was gradually being displaced to an increasing extent by the newer position "before the Table": that by about the thirteenth century the new position was so strongly established that rubrics directing it began to appear and its use to be regarded as normal, but never to the entire exclusion of the older Use, preserved at conservative Rome and other places.

The origin of the "back-to-people" (so-called Eastward) position, or the reasons for its invention, are not matters of exact history. One theory connects it with the erection of basilicas with Eastern sanctuaries, as if the point of the compass were deemed to override the proportion of worship, but I have not found evidence to support this. Another much more probable theory is that it originated when additions to existing churches (with Western sanctuaries and face-to-people Use) were made at the Eastern end to accommodate monks, or special churches were built for the exclusive use of monastic or clerical communities.

In the great churches the "college" of clergy was at festivals grouped behind the celebrant in the apse, all facing the laity in the nave; and the clergy came to think of themselves as "assisting" the celebrant, and occupying a position of honour superior to the place of the laity. When they in their turn formed the only congregation, the same conception surviving might bring about a revolution (as so often is the case) from mere ultra-conservative obstinacy and reluctance to occupy the place of the laymen. In support of this theory is not only the architectural evidence, but also the survival in the phrase "assisting at Mass."

One thing is certain: the practice came into the Church after the Arian heresy as to our Lord's Person; and its symbolism is precisely that which Arianism calls for. It pictures the re-presentation of a propitiatory offering made by an inferior Deity to another greater Deity; in direct challenge to the New Testament teaching that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. And it is also clear that it made its way in the Church with the growth of false doctrine as to the atoning and substitutionary work of our Lord and the nature of the most comfortable Sacrament of His Body and Blood. The Syrian Al-Mansur (called St. John Damascene), who was Vizier at the Muslim Court of Baghdad, broached the Augmentation theory, which became for a time the official doctrine of the East, about 740; and Paschasius Radbertus, the monk of Corbey, propounded the doctrine of Transubstantiation about 826 (although the name was not invented till about 1100). Lanfranc, the man who appears to have abolished the "face-to-people" ministrations at Canterbury, was the man who brought the doctrine of Transubstantiation into the English Church. This was no mere coincidence. The back-to-people position teaches to the eye that an offering is being made, or re-presented, to God. Such teaching necessarily involves false doctrine as to the relation between the Father and the Son in the work of atonement, dividing the substance of the Godhead, and also false doctrine as to the nature of the Sacrament, which is, rightly, the man-ward proclamation of a finished work.

No one has put this latter point more pithily than the martyred Bishop Hugh Latimer: "And where you should preach the benefit of Christ's death to the people, you speak to the wall in a foreign tongue"; and also, "And I say, you lay people, as you are called, come away from forged sacrifices . . . lest your bodies, which are, or should be, Christ's temples, be false witness-bearers against the blood of our redemption."

It will be seen, therefore, that while the position of the Minister-Celebrant behind the Table, facing the people, is both Primitive and (in the sense traditional to the English Church) "Catholic," the position before the Table, with back-to-the-people, is neither Primitive nor (in any proper sense) "Catholic." It is merely the expression of the false conceptions of the work of our Lord, and the doctrine of the Eucharist, which corrupted the Church in the Dark Ages and dominated the Middle Ages. As soon as the spirit of the Reformation awoke, with its appeal to Holy Scripture, antiquity, and true catholicity, the "Eastward Position" (to borrow the modern question-begging phrase) was challenged.

In England no change in the position of the minister was made in 1549; for although he was allowed option between the Mass Vestment and the Cope (probably, but not clearly, the black choir cope is meant), he was still directed to be "standing humbly afore the midst of the altar" as in the Sarum Rite. But in 1552 the new rubric appeared "standing at the North side of the Table." This is the first *certain* appearance in the Church of the practice of standing at the side of the Table instead of either before or behind it. I repeat that this is the true liturgical distinction, and it is quite uninfluenced by the shape of the Table (which might be square, oblong, or round—or, indeed, any shape; there is a seventeenth-century semicircular table in one church in the City of London<sup>1</sup>). The Table was intended to stand, of course, as it usually does to-day, but not always, close to the wall. In the return made by Archbishop Parker in 1565 we read: "The Table standeth in the body of the church in some places, in others it standeth in the chancel. In some places the Table standeth, altarlike, distant from the wall a yard; in some others in the midst of the chancel, North and South." Presumably the latter phrase means that the oblong table was placed so that its *length* was North and South, which would be the ordinary usage of the term. But most of the Elizabethan tables extant are not much longer than their breadth<sup>2</sup>: even where they were it should be remembered that many chancels were bare of seating. But whatever the shape or position of the Table, it is clear beyond question that the intention was that the celebrant should place

<sup>1</sup> I have recently seen the statement that the square cedar wood table of Nicholas Ferrar still exists at Little Gidding. This would date from Stuart days only; but it is interesting.

<sup>2</sup> At Kedington in Suffolk I found a Tudor table, with the characteristic bulbous legs, nearly as broad as it was long, in the vestry under the Tower, much worm-eaten. It had been displaced in the Sanctuary by a smaller, narrower Jacobean table. At this church the (seventeenth century) rails are made for kneeling north, south and west of the table.

himself at the side of it, not before it and not behind it. Cartwright's amusing grumble that after morning prayer the minister "for saying another number of prayers, climbeth up to the farther end of the chancel and runneth as far from the people as the wall will let him," is not without value as evidence; but all the Elizabethan controversialists, whether Popish or Puritan, are in agreement in language that bears out Parker's return and verifies the position and usage to be that which is fancifully and unliturgically referred to by Lancelot Andrewes when he speaks of the clergy at the Table "one at one end and the other at the other, representing the two cherubim at the mercy seat." This, of course, was under James I, when polemical reasons were causing the invention of a supposed distinction between "side" and "end."

There was evidently considerable uneasiness on this point of the position of the Minister during the contest with the Puritans in the reigns of the first two Stuarts. There is rarely smoke without fire; and it seems clear that some ministers did act in such a way as to cause suspicion of their intent. Cosin vaguely admits that "he might haply do as others did there [Durham Choir] before him (though he remembereth not to have so done these twelve years) and step to the former part thereof, to consecrate and bless those elements which otherwise he could not conveniently reach," and he explains the excuse to be that the Table was "about seven foot in length." I have also come to the conclusion, after renewed careful study, that Matthew Wren's words involve the construction that *once*, in 1636, at Ipswich, he consecrated before the Table. His words are ambiguous, and obviously minimizing in intention, but I now think that is their effect. His excuse is that he was "but low of stature." But *exceptio probat regulam*: the fuss over these isolated instances of transgression witnesses to the rule and normal practice: and the lame excuses of the distinguished delinquents show that they knew they had overstepped the mark. Cosin indeed states as his practice that "he constantly stood at the North side or end of the Table to read and perform all parts of the Communion Service there." This is long before he became Bishop, when he was merely a Prebendary.

In 1661 the Revision of the Prayer Book was taken in hand. Up to now the rubric before the Consecration Prayer read simply: "Then the priest standing up, shall say as followeth." Wren, who was chairman of the Revisers, proposed that it should run: "Then the Priest standing before the Table shall so order and set the Bread and the Wine that, while he is pronouncing the following Collect, he may readily take the Bread and break it, and also take the Cup, to pour into it (if he pour it not before), and then he shall say . . ." The rest of the Revisers, however, evidently recognized the dangerous ambiguity<sup>1</sup> of these words, and in the first stage of the revision they

<sup>1</sup> I once hinted to Mr. J. T. Tomlinson that the ambiguity suggested a desire on Wren's part to have a rubric *patient* of the eastward position; but he was exceeding wroth with me at such an aspersion on Bishop Wren's character!

preferred the form: "When the Priest hath so ordered the Bread and Wine placed upon the Table as that he may with the more ease and decency take them into his hands, standing up he shall say as followeth." But this had got them out of one difficulty into another, as these words almost suggest that the ordering preceded the standing up! So finally they settled on the form in the Annexed Book of 1662: "When the Priest, standing before the Table, hath so ordered the Bread and Wine, that he may with the more readiness and decency break the Bread before the people, and take the Cup into his hands; he shall say the Prayer of Consecration as followeth." This must have seemed to them invulnerable; for the semi-colon after "hands" expressly grammatically limits the "standing before the Table" to the act of ordering; while the words "before the people" (*coram populo*) necessitate a position that makes the manual acts (now expressly directed for the first time) visible: and visitations of the following years show that this was the contemporaneous interpretation (Pory asks if the Table is so set "as the priest at the time of consecration may stand before the Table to order the bread and wine"). But, alas, they reckoned not with the printers and the casuists of later centuries: by the unauthorised substitution of a comma for the semi-colon, Wren's ambiguity was revived, and a huge column of argument came to be built on the unstable foundation of the fateful comma! The mischief began, perhaps, with the Latin Prayer Book of 1670, but it was not until the Nonjuring schism that the practice of coming before the Table for the whole Consecration Prayer appears to have been raised by a section of the Nonjurors, and carried by them into the Tractarian ranks. One of the most illustrious of the Nonjurors, Dr. Thomas Brett (consecrated a bishop of the schism), opposed the practice and even argued for the antiquity of the North side position.

A few words may be necessary as to the legal decisions of the later nineteenth century, on which the modern "landslide" in favour of the "back-to-people" position rests its claim to "legality." Most of its advocates glibly cite the "Lincoln Judgment" as their authority. As a matter of fact it is the judgment, or more accurately the "advice"<sup>1</sup> tendered to the Crown by the Lords of the Council, in *Ridsdale v. Clifton* that is crucial, as follows:—

"Their Lordships are not prepared to hold that a penal charge is established against the appellant merely by the proof that he stood while saying the Prayer of Consecration at the west side of the Communion Table, without further evidence that the people

<sup>1</sup> The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is not a Court. The appeal from the Ecclesiastical Courts is to the Crown (i.e., the King in Council); and the Crown chooses its own legal expert advisers. But in hearing Church appeals the Crown summons Bishops as Assessors. The whole campaign against "Privy Council judgments" is based on the misconception that the "Judicial Committee" is a Court. Whatever "reform" of Ecclesiastical Courts is made, and whatever new appellate tribunal is constituted, the ultimate right of the subject to appeal to the Crown cannot well be avoided. (Cf. Bishop Pollock's *The Nation and the Church*, pp. 37-40.)

could not, in the sense in which their Lordships have used the words, see him break the bread or take the cup into his hand, and they will, therefore, recommend that an alteration should be made in the decree in this respect." They had previously expressed their opinion: "The minister is to order the elements 'standing before the Table'; words which, whether the Table stands 'altarwise' along the east wall, or in the body of the church or chancel, would be fully satisfied by his standing on the north side and looking towards the south; but which also, in the opinion of their Lordships, as the Tables are now usually, and in their opinion lawfully, placed, authorise him to do those acts standing on the west side and looking towards the east. Beyond this, and after this, there is no specific direction that, during this prayer, he is to stand on the west side, or that he is to stand on the north side." Here, as regards the Consecration Prayer, the legal view rests, as this point has not since been reopened.

What then happened in *Read v. Bishop of Lincoln*—the much exploited "Lincoln Judgment"? In the Court of the Archbishop two separate charges were made affecting this point: (1) That Bishop King stood during the Communion Service down to the ordering of the bread and wine on the west side of the Table and not on the north side thereof, and (2) that he stood while reading the Prayer of Consecration on the west side of the Holy Table with his face to the east, between the people and the Table, and with his back to the people, so that the communicants could not see him break the bread nor take the cup into his hand according to the directions of the rubric. It will be seen that this second charge is strictly based on the letter of the decision in *Ridsdale v. Clifton*. It was fought throughout on the point of the visibility of the manual acts. The decision of the Court was "that the order of Holy Communion requires that the manual acts should be visible," and that "the Lord Bishop has mistaken the true interpretation of the order of the Holy Communion in this particular, and that the manual acts must be performed in such wise as to be visible to the communicants properly placed." The Archbishop remarked "it is not charged as illegal that he stood in what is called the eastward position," which was technically true, so any decision on this point was avoided; and as there could be no appeal on this charge, the decision in *Ridsdale v. Clifton* is the last judicial word. Probably the promoters had hoped to secure such a decision as would have taken the sting out of *Ridsdale v. Clifton*, but they were no match for the Archbishop. But the first charge (which excluded the Consecration Prayer) was fought in detail. The Court (*i.e.*, the Archbishop) decided that a certain liberty in the application of the term "north side" existed, and "dismissed" the charge. "Such existing liberty," quoth the Archbishop, "it is not the function of a Court, but only of legislation, to curtail." The Archbishop remarked: "The Eastward position is, it is said, a sacrificial position. . . . If it were true it would apply more strongly by far to the Consecration Prayer, where such position

is admitted to be lawful, than to the beginning of the service. But by whomsoever put forward the statement is, in both cases, without foundation": and later, "none of the alternative positions which have been mentioned . . . convey any intrinsic error or erroneous shade of doctrine." This dictum must, of course, be construed in the light of Archbishop Benson's own view, as to what was or was not erroneous. The Archbishop made no general statement as to doctrinal significance. The observation that the "Eastward position" was "admitted to be lawful" in the Consecration Prayer does not appear to be supported by the official record: but it may have been inferred from the absence of argument. The dictum as to the significance of the position may be discounted by the curt opinion of the chief assessor, Bishop (afterwards Archbishop) Temple, that "There could be no doubt that the Eastward Position and the sacrificial aspect went together." The *only appeal* to the Crown (on these charges) was on the limited point as to the position prior to the Consecration Prayer, and by the form of the Archbishop's judgment (coupled with that of their own charges) the appellants were precluded from arguing on the Consecration Prayer, and the Lords of the Council followed the Archbishop in accepting the unhistorical theory of change of position of Table. They pointed out that "the appellants did not seek to impeach the decision" in *Ridsdale v. Clifton*, which they stated more brusquely than accurately as being that the celebrant may at the time of consecration stand at the middle of the Table facing eastwards (the precise decision is given above); and asked "of what importance" it could be to insist upon the minister standing at the north side of the Table for another point of the service, saying "The very necessity of occupying the position . . . during the early part of the service, would serve to emphasise the subsequent change of position"—a very true deduction if the premise had been equally true. Finally, their Lordships advise the Crown "that it (the rubric) cannot be regarded as so definitely and unequivocally enjoining that the priest shall, no matter how the Table may be placed, stand at that end of the Table which faces the North when saying the opening prayers that no other position may be assumed without the commission of an ecclesiastical offence. . . . All that they determine is that it is not an ecclesiastical offence to stand at the Northern part of the side which faces Westwards."

The legal position is, therefore, that by the combined effect of *Ridsdale v. Clifton* and *Read v. Bishop of Lincoln* (but not by the "Lincoln Judgment" alone, for the earlier "judgment" is the key to the latter) the back-to-people, or "Eastward" position, with an unimportant limitation as to the part of the West side occupied, is "not illegal" in the sense that no minister who adopts it can be judicially penalised for so doing. But there has been no legal alteration of the rubrics as contained in the Prayer Book of 1662, which rubrics continue in full moral force. Beyond dispute, even on these judgments, the more certainly legally accurate (and most certainly the historically sounder) position is that "at the North side of," and not that "before," the Table; but those who

wish to stand "before" the Table cannot be precluded from such moral support as they can obtain from the Archbishop's dicta. Nevertheless the same could also be said for anyone who decided to stand "behind" the Table; for if liberty exists it cannot be one-sided. If the ethical obligation to stand at the North side is relaxed, the relaxation must be absolute and not limited to one particular variation. Some years back one of the bishops suggested that, to secure uniformity, all should agree to restore the primitive face-to-people usage. There could be no better solution; and it is the most desirable piece of Prayer Book revision.

Is it not clear that as matters are, those who contend for the true Eucharistic teaching of the Church, as re-asserted at the Reformation, are put at an unfair disadvantage, as regards the appeal to the eye? The position before the Table, back-to-people, is powerful in its implication and symbolism: and its teaching insensibly soaks into the mind and consciousness of the ordinary worshipper. The position at the side of the Table is neutral and (while it is expressive of quiet dignity when taken in the old-fashioned way<sup>1</sup>) needs explanation by word to emphasise its appropriateness and devotional value. So the Evangelical faces the Sacerdotalist, in this matter, much as a contestant with one hand tied behind his back faces an adversary with both hands free. Put the Minister-celebrant behind the Table, as in ancient days, and the symbolism and teaching become manifest to the worshipper without necessity for verbal explanations.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The use of the fald-stool helps to obscure it.

<sup>2</sup> Read regularly the exhortation, "Dearly beloved in the Lord" for the teaching to the ear!

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Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co. issue *Through Human Eyes*, by F. Chenalls Williams (paper, 3s. 6d. net). In a number of brief sketches, scenes from our Lord's life and teaching are reconstituted, so as to bring out their chief fact or feature. The graphic nature of the treatment is likely to be a means of instruction on some neglected aspects of New Testament incidents and stories.

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Messrs. Morgan & Scott Ltd. publish *A Jewish Missionary's Experience of Divine Guidance during War, Revolution, and Opposition in Eastern Europe*, by Peter Smoljar (Mildway Mission to the Jews) (1s. net). It is translated by Mr. S. H. Wilkinson, who pays a tribute to the devotion of the writer.

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The Church Missionary Review gives valuable information on some of the latest phases and problems of Missionary work. Educational Work in Africa is attracting considerable attention, and is dealt with in recent numbers. Japan, China and India provide subjects for interesting articles. The Quarterly Survey contains the latest news from the Field.