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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Report of the Five Bishops on Vestments.

BY THE REV. CANON NUNN, M.A.

WHEN the Report of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline was issued, many persons were encouraged to hope that it would be the means of restraining practices that had been declared illegal by the Courts. The imperfect presentation of certain historical facts in the Report, and the suggestion made in the early part of the Report, but not repeated in the Recommendations, that "there will probably be cases in which some practices significant of teaching legally declared not to be contrary or repugnant to the Articles or formularies of the Church of England may reasonably be allowed" (words which seemed to point to the teaching of Mr. Bennett, which the Court, whilst not visiting with legal condemnation, had described as "rash and ill-judged, and perilously near a violation of the law"), caused some apprehension as to the purpose of some members of the Commission. But the Report was signed by all the members of the Commission, and we were willing to hope for the best.

All such hope is now abandoned in the light of the Report of the five Bishops who were appointed by the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury as a Sub-Committee to "draft an historical memorandum as to the ornaments of the Church and its ministers." The necessity for such a Report was dwelt upon by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who spoke of the inadequate information upon which some of the past proceedings in Convocation, and, indeed, some of the decisions of the judges, had been based.

The Bishops of Salisbury, Bristol, Exeter, Gloucester, and Ely formed the Committee. All the five Bishops, in presenting their Report, emphasized the fact that they had treated the subject from a purely "historical" point of view, and with entire freedom from "bias." We can, therefore, have no doubt as to the sincerity of their intentions. But circumstances were against

them ; and the conditions of their respective dioceses with regard to ritualistic practices, and their own past actions and previous utterances, were difficulties in the way of their seeing everything in the "dry light" of history, and these they cannot be said to have successfully surmounted.

The Bishop of Gloucester in a single word seemed to show in which direction their sympathies were naturally turning. They had been "fortunate," he said, in discovering certain supposed evidence against the Ridsdale Judgment.

It is well that we should state at the outset the conclusion to which the Report comes. It is as follows: "That the Ornaments Rubric cannot be rightly interpreted as excluding the use of all Vestments other than the surplice in parish churches, and in cathedral and collegiate churches the surplice, hood, and cope." The Report thus directly contravenes the Ridsdale Judgment. The result of its publication must be an encouragement to those who have hitherto set the law at defiance, and it will probably add to their numbers.

It is plain that the only way to meet the allegations in the Report is to carefully test their validity. This we propose to do, and we venture to think that it will be proved that in many cases the evidence from history has not been fully or fairly given, and that in other cases, where the evidence has been given more or less fully, the verdict has not been given according to the evidence. We shall have to consider, not only the Report itself, but also the carefully prepared speeches of the Bishops of Salisbury and Gloucester by which it was introduced. It is needful to state the case very plainly, lest in the multitude of details the principal issues be lost sight of.

On the one hand, it is maintained that the question at issue is one of vital moment, affecting the "simplicity" of the Gospel ; that it is a question of the doctrine of the Mass as taught in pre-Reformation times ; that it involves the reversal of the practice of 300 years, and the condemnation of Judgments founded upon right principles and supported by sound evidence.

On the other hand, it is contended that the question is

“largely one of taste and sentiment, and, in a very small degree, one of principle” (the Bishop of Salisbury); that the disuse of the Vestments for 300 years, though an argument appealing to “the man in the street,” is an *a priori* argument, to be met by a parallel to be drawn from the disuse of the cope, which is acknowledged to be legal (the Bishop of Gloucester); and that the Judgments which are depended upon were founded upon insufficient or incorrect evidence, and are corrected under the fuller light and superior arguments of the Report.

With regard to the fact that “principle,” and not taste, is chiefly in question, it is needful only to point to the language and practices of those who are most forward in demanding the innovations referred to. They use the word “Mass” systematically; they express their belief in the doctrine propounded by Mr. Bennett in more or less modified forms; they desire to use the Vestments as the expression of their doctrines; they are anxious in many cases, not only for the restoration of the Vestments, but of pre-Reformation prayers and practices. Upon this matter of the significance of the contest there ought to be no doubt, and no attempt should be made to obscure the issues.

The argument of the Bishop of Gloucester with regard to the custom of 300 years requires careful sifting. It appears to be briefly this:—The disuse of the Vestments for 300 years is no satisfactory proof of their illegality. For consider, the cope in cathedrals at certain times was no doubt prescribed by the Advertisements and the Canons, and yet it has been neglected by many, and over long periods; and even those who have assisted in deciding that Vestments are illegal have themselves, in many cases, omitted to wear the cope when the law ordered them to do so.—There is a strange confusion of thought in this argument. If it were argued that the discontinuance of the Vestments and the use of the surplice for 300 years was by itself a proof that the Vestments were illegal, there would be something to be said for the Bishop’s argument. But even then, in order to put the comparison “on all fours,” it would be necessary to show that the cope had been universally dis-

continued, and, more than this, that it had been systematically destroyed by persons in authority, like the Vestments. But the argument against the Vestments is simply this—that as they were discontinued for 300 years, there must have been some cause for the neglect, if it were simply neglect; but as there was a rapid and almost complete destruction of the Vestments, some sufficient legal cause must be inquired for, and that this is found in the Injunctions and Advertisements. These are objected against, not as effective factors in history, but as legally invalid, on technical grounds.

But the greatest part of the Report and of the speeches of the Bishops is taken up with a detailed assault upon the interpretation given of the Ornaments Rubric in the Ridsdale Judgment. It is necessary here to go into considerable detail. It is unfortunate for this purpose that very few Churchmen are in possession of sufficient documentary evidence to enable them to form a sound judgment upon this question. All, however, possess a Prayer Book. There is only one Ornaments Rubric in the present Prayer Book, and it is found immediately before the Order for Morning Prayer. It runs as follows: “And here it is to be noted that such ornaments of the Church and of the ministers thereof, at all times of their ministration, shall be retained and be in use, as were in this Church of England, by the authority of Parliament, in the second year of the reign of King Edward the Sixth.”

This is sometimes said to be “our only direction” in the matter. The Bishop of Salisbury said, speaking of the rubric: “We believe that it was intended by itself to be, with the Ordinal, a sufficient directory for public worship.”

But every complete Prayer Book ought to contain another document, which is necessary for the understanding of the subject—*i.e.*, the Uniformity Act of 1559. This Act, together with the Act of 1662, forms part of the Prayer Book, as passed by Parliament and the Convocations at the last revision. The Act comes first in the Table of Contents in the sealed book. A complete Prayer Book is found upon the prayer desk of every

church, and it is presumably only for the sake of economy that our ordinary Prayer Books are left incomplete. A few pence will procure a complete book from the Christian Knowledge Society. If the Act of 1559 be referred to, a proviso (25) towards the end of it will disclose the origin of the Ornaments Rubric, and open the way to the consideration of the "authentic limitations" of the rubric, as they are called by Archdeacon Sharpe. The proviso runs as follows: "25. Provided always and be it enacted that such Ornaments of the Church and of the ministers thereof shall be retained and be in use as was in this Church of England, by authority of Parliament, in the second year of the reign of King Edward the Sixth until other order shall be therein taken by the authority of the Queen's Majesty, with the advice of her Commissioners appointed and authorized under the Great Seal of England, or of the Metropolitan of this Realm." The Act, it should be stated, had previously re-enacted the Second Prayer Book of King Edward VI., with three changes only, which were specified.

Power was thus given to the Queen to take "other order" with regard to the Ornaments, and the whole contention is as to whether the Queen did, or did not, take "other order" in the manner prescribed.

The reason for the insertion of this proviso is thus stated by one of those who had to do with the framing of the Act, Bishop Sandys. Writing to Archbishop Parker he says: "Our gloss upon this text is that we shall not be forced to use them, but that others in the meantime shall not take them away, but that they may remain for the Queen." Strype, who records the statement, adds, "but this must be looked upon as the conjecture of a private man." The conjecture, however, appeared to turn out to be correct.

No sooner was the Act passed than the Queen issued her Injunctions, in which we find the following: "47. Inventories of Church Goods: That the Churchwardens of every parish shall deliver unto our Visitors the inventories of vestments, copes and other ornaments, plate, books, and especially of

grayles, couchers, legends, processions, manuals, hymnals, portesses, and such like appertaining to the Church."

"This clearly indicates," writes Canon G. G. Perry, in the "Student's English Church History," p. 266, "that all these things were to be taken away for the profit of the Crown." The result is recorded in the Report as follows: "Chasubles appear to have been very generally destroyed, as monuments of superstition, though occasional instances of their retention may occur." There is no doubt that the Vestments were neither "retained" nor "used," although a rubric to this effect had been set in the Prayer Book, in the place of the rubric of 1552.

But what provision did the Injunctions make for the vesture of the clergy? The thirtieth Injunction prescribed the use of the garments "both in the Church and without," which were "commonly and orderly received in the later year of King Edward the Sixth." The Report says of this last sentence: "The language is quite general, and does not look as if it referred to a definite direction of the Prayer Book of 1552." There is, however, no other definite direction for it to refer to, and we find Archbishop Parker subsequently inquiring after the surplice "prescribed by the Queen's Majesty's Injunctions and the Book of Common Prayer" (Report, p. 67).

Thus the Report gives the evidence, but declines to accept the conclusion that follows from it.

Here, then, we have "other order" taken by the Queen in the matter of the Ornaments. Questions have been raised as to whether the prescribed consent of the Archbishop or of the Commissioners had been obtained to the Injunctions. Archbishop Parker, at the time that the Injunctions were issued, was nominated to the Archbishopric, but not consecrated. There appears to be some question as to the time when the Commissioners were first appointed.

This, however, is certain, that the Injunctions had the authority of the Queen; that they were placed in the hands of her Visitors, who were also Commissioners; that they proceeded to require the subscription of the clergy to them; and that their

subsequent action was regulated by them. They proved effectual "other order" in the matter of the Vestments. The proviso in the Act of Uniformity was thus fulfilled, and the rubric which had been inserted in the Prayer Book, it is not known with certainty by whose direction, became from the first "a dead letter" (Perry, p. 290).

The Report by no means does justice to the facts of the case when it says (p. 66): "It is clear that from the first the rubric was never fully obeyed, and that no attempt was made to enforce its requirements as a whole." No instance can be given of the use of the Vestments in their entirety. They were not used in the Queen's chapel. Archbishop Parker was consecrated without them.

It is significant, as observed by Mr. Clay, the editor of the Parker Society's publications, that in the Latin Prayer Book, issued in the year following, the Ornaments Rubric was omitted altogether.

Such were the results of the Injunctions. They were generally effective for the removal of the Mass Vestments proper. But the cope was in some places retained, although placed amongst the things to be put into the "inventories."

The Queen would appear to have had a partiality for the use of the cope. On the other hand, there was a remissness in the use of the surplice. The positive orders of the Injunctions were not as explicit as they might have been. The old rubric of 1552, which required the surplice, had been, without any authority, as it would seem, omitted from the Prayer Book, and the new rubric, provisional in its nature, had been practically set aside by the Injunctions. Hence there arose a necessity for some new orders. These were presently found in the Advertisements.

It is to be observed that the Injunctions were duly brought forward by counsel in the Ridsdale case. But in the Judgment we find the following observations: "Their Lordships do not think it necessary to dwell upon the Injunctions of Queen Elizabeth, and still less upon the interpretation of those

Injunctions, because they cannot satisfy themselves either that the Injunctions pointed to the Vestments now in controversy, or that they were issued by the advice required by the section of the Act of Parliament."

The Court accordingly turned to the Advertisements, which they regarded as a clear taking of order according to the Act. It is to be regretted that this course was adopted. Much was lost by it. Considerable additional information respecting the Injunctions has been accumulated since the judgment was given. But the advocates of Ritualism have fully appreciated the advantage thus given them. As a rule they endeavour to ignore the Injunctions, or, when obliged to notice them, to explain away their meaning and dispute their authority. They are thus free to spend all their energies upon the Advertisements, which form the basis of the Ridsdale Judgment. Accordingly a large part of the Report and of the speeches of the Bishops is taken up in attempting to show that the Advertisements were not "other order" according to the requirements of the Act of Uniformity; and that, therefore, as "other order" has never been taken, the Ornaments Rubric of our present Prayer Book remains our only direction in the question of the vesture of the minister.

The Report states that the five Bishops have "thought it worth while to spend a considerable time in summarizing and discussing all the evidence which, as far as we know, is now available." It is well to have the question thus brought to a definite issue. Whether they have been in any degree successful in discrediting the Ridsdale Judgment, or in detracting from the authority of the Advertisements as "other order" under the Act of 1559, is a question which deserves and must have the most careful examination.

