

**BEFORE THE TABLE: AN INQUIRY,
HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL, INTO
THE TRUE
MEANING OF THE CONSECRATION
RUBRIC IN THE COMMUNION SERVICE
OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

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Before the table: an inquiry, historical and theological, into the true meaning of the consecration rubric in the communion service of the Church of England by J. S. Howson

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WITH

APPENDIX AND SUPPLEMENT,

CONTAINING

PAPERS BY THE RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP OF ST. ANDREWS,
AND THE REV. R. W. KENNION, M.A.

BY

J. S. HOWSON, D.D.,

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PREFACE.

FROM various friends, to whom warm acknowledgments have been privately made, I have received much assistance in the preparation of this essay. Notwithstanding this help, however, I cannot expect that in a volume written in fragments of time, amid many and serious hindrances, and without easy access to books of reference, I can, even with the exercise of the utmost care, have avoided some mistakes. That which I earnestly claim is, that these pages may be judged, not by collateral errors, which do not affect the general question, but by conclusions resting on the main points of the case.

In an inquiry of this kind, it always happens either that the case breaks down as the investigation becomes closer, or that the conviction becomes stronger and stronger from point to point. My experience in the matter before us has been of the second kind; and I am persuaded that, with a larger command of information and of time, this argument could have been considerably strengthened. In reading what has been written by some who have been led to an opinion contrary to mine, I have been much struck by their

imperfect treatment of the subject, and by their omission of many things which, as it seems to me, imperatively demand notice. I impute no blame for such omission. We need only imagine that the habit has been formed of looking only on one side of the question, that there is an eagerly-cherished desire to prove a point, and that the writer is surrounded by the pressure of a party eager for success; and the phenomenon is explained. Still, such a state of things is not conducive to the elucidation of truth; and I will take leave to illustrate what I mean in two or three particulars.

The books or pamphlets to which I refer are published without the slightest intimation of the existence of other publications, containing formidable arguments which have not been answered. I will here mention more particularly the pamphlets and articles of Mr. Droop,¹ Canon Elliott,² and Canon Simmons.³ I must indeed confess that I myself, in the following pages, have referred very slightly to these writers, and that I have not even yet read carefully and thoroughly what they have laid before the public. But I venture to think that it has been good policy on my own part to write independently; while certainly it will, in the long run, be found bad policy on the part of others to keep out of view those reasonings which demand a reply.

¹ See p. 145, *Notes*. To this pamphlet by Mr. Droop is now to be added another, of nearly equal importance, on the *Edwardian Vestments*.

² See Appendix G.

³ *Ibid.* See also p. 55, *Note*.

A second instance is connected with the famous name of Bishop Cosin. Again and again, in the Lower Houses of both Convocations, and in various speeches and publications, the charge which was brought against him, as regards his alleged practice of consecrating in the Eastward Position, has been reiterated; but perfect silence has been maintained, except when such silence has been forcibly interrupted, respecting that prelate's disavowal of the charge.¹ In the case of a living man it is acknowledged by all persons to be culpable to repeat an accusation which has been refuted. How far, in the case of the dead, this rule of charity and justice ought to prevail, I will not inquire. Concerning Bishop Cosin I will, to what is contained in the following pages, only add this, that since they were written, I have had an opportunity of examining the MS. notes (intermingled with those of Sancroft) in the Prayer-Book which is one of the great treasures of the Diocesan Library at Durham,² and that I am persuaded that if his life and opinions were fully set before us, certain results would appear not acceptable to some of those who confidently quote his authority.

Another case in point is the oblivion to which a very important and explicit passage in L'Estrange's "Alliance of Divine Offices" has been, carelessly or carefully, consigned. This writer, as one of the Laudian school of divines, is of peculiar weight. His

¹ See pp. 81—83.

² These MS. notes have been published, but not completely, in the *Correspondence* referred to below, pp. 15 and 21, *Notes*.

work has been thought worthy of a place in the "Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology;" and the first edition having been published in 1659, and the second in 1690, it bridges over, in a most significant manner, the period with which we have chiefly to do. Now in this book, among the comments on the Eucharistic Service, we find these words from the "MS. Collections of a Learned Man" quoted with approval:—"As for the Priest standing at the North side of the Table, this seemeth to avoid the fashion of the Priest's standing with his face towards the East, as is the Popish practice."¹ I must confess that I have myself forgotten to quote this passage in its proper place, though it was often in my thoughts.² Perhaps the persuasive effect of it will be equally secured by its being placed before the reader's attention here.

Another very remarkable instance is the neglect of all reference, on the part of authors who have written on the general subject with both eager interest and considerable learning, to that rubric of the Non-jurors, which shows that the word "before" was used by them as synonymous with "on the north side,"

¹ P. 245 of the fourth ed. (1846. *Lib. of Anglo-Catholic Theology*). The same paragraph contains remarks, which ought not to be overlooked, having reference to the placing of the Lord's Table. The 82nd Canon is compared with Queen Elizabeth's Injunction; and these words are added—"Nothing can be more express and demonstrative that the Table placed where the Altar stood was but seposed, set out of the way, daring only the time of non-communication, and that at the time of the Communion it was to be removed."

² I had fallen into a similar omission, which I cannot account for, in respect of certain equivalent and most explicit words in the Catechism of 1674. This omission I have endeavoured to remedy at the end of Appendix D.