

**REVISION OF THE LITURGY. A
LECTURE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT
AND HISTORY OF THE BOOK OF
COMMON PRAYER**

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Revision of the Liturgy. A lecture on the establishment and history of the Book of common prayer by J. N. Bennett

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J. N. BENNETT

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Revision of the Liturgy.

A LECTURE

ON

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND HISTORY

OF THE

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER,

DELIVERED AT A MEETING OF

The Church Reform Association,

AND OTHER

MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND,

*At the Freemasons' Hall, and by adjournment at the Royal Hotel,
Plymouth, on the 14th and 15th of February, 1851.*

By J. N. BENNETT, Esq.

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PREFACE.

A Church Reform Association has recently been established at Plymouth, the leading object of which is,

“To seek a Revision of the Liturgy and Canons of the Church of England, and the exclusion therefrom of all matter susceptible of a Romish interpretation.”

With a view to avoid any unseemly popular discussion on the delicate questions involved in this proposal, it was deemed expedient on the formation of the Society, that the occasion giving rise to it and its general object and purposes should be brought before the public in the form of Lectures, rather than through the medium of a Public Meeting.

Accordingly Dr. Soltan, Mr. J. N. Bennett, and Mr. P. F. Bellamy, Members of the Association, engaged to prepare Three Lectures for the purpose—one on the subject of “Tractarianism;” another on “The Establishment and History of the Book of Common Prayer;” and a third on “The Priest of the Rubric.” Of this series the following Lecture is the second, which, together with those by Dr. Soltan and Mr. Bellamy, is published by the Association.

The writers on whom reliance has been placed for the Historical portions of this Lecture are frequently not specified in connection with the matter stated. To supply this omission (if in a hasty Lecture it be such) it may be here noticed that the authorities principally referred to are Fuller, Collier, Burnet, Lister, Calamy, Keeling, Le Bas, Berens, Southey, and the Statutes at large.

In the Tabular Statement at the end of the Lecture, illustrative of the changes which the Liturgy has undergone since its establishment, the precise wording of some of the Rubrics has, in a few cases, been deviated from, for the sake of brevity, but it is believed that the sense has always been faithfully given.

J. N. B.

Windsor Villas, Plymouth,
February 28th, 1851.

Book, and are consequently assumed to be Doctrines of the Church of England. I will particularly name, amongst others, Baptismal Regeneration, or, the absolute renewal of the Moral Nature of all Infants, in and by the Act of Baptism; The alleged change of the elements at the Communion into the real Body and Blood of Christ, by the Act of Consecration; The sacrifice of the Altar; The assumed Sacerdotal Office and Authority; Auricular Confession; Priestly Absolution; and Apostolical Succession.

I propose, by and bye, briefly to advert to the elements of several of these Tenets, as claimed by the Tractarian Clergy, to be justified by the Church's language, and shall incidentally refer to them and other kindred Tenets throughout this Lecture—as being in whole or in part, and sometimes more and sometimes less directly, the continued subjects of protest to the Reforming Body in the Church, from one generation to another.

At present I merely make this enumeration, in order that as we examine the Original Liturgy and its subsequent variations, we may keep those Tenets, forming the basis of the modern Tractarian Scheme, prominently in view, it being my desire to call your attention especially, if not solely, to such portions of the Liturgy as have been alleged to teach or tolerate them, either by its forms of Worship, or in its rites and ceremonies.

And here I may observe, once for all, that I do not for a moment admit that the Doctrine of the Church of England is unsound or erroneous. I look on her exposition of Christian Doctrine as an uncompromising and invaluable testimony in favour of Protestant and Gospel truth. I do, however, without hesitation, admit that the Articles of the Church, and the occasional Services cannot both claim to be received, *literally*, as true. A governing authority must be conceded either to one or the other of them. If the Articles are, as the description appended to them in the Prayer Book declares them to be, established for settling diversities of opinion in Religion, then in all particulars in which the services are ambiguous or seem *prima facie* to be at variance with them, such ambiguities must, I conceive, be explained, and such differences adjusted by submitting the passages in which they occur to the authority of the Articles. I know, however, that *this claim of supremacy* for the Articles, is neither acted on *nor admitted to be just*. I know that men contend that the

antiquity of the Forms of Prayer adopted by the Liturgy, entitles them to an authority, equal if not superior to that of the dogmatic articles of belief; that the law of prayer is paramount to the law of faith, and that it is consequently maintained that whatsoever is found in the doctrines of Grace, which are clearly taught by the Articles, inconsistent with the material service, sometimes apparently tolerated by the Liturgy, ought properly to be discarded or refined, so as to speak a language in harmony with it. Hence the two schools of Theology in our Church, thus appealing to different and adverse tribunals, obtain from them correspondingly opposing sentences. Whilst the advocates of one of them proclaim as the doctrines of the Church of England, the free Salvation of Christ; those of the other are, according to their views, equally warranted in holding and teaching all the essential doctrines of Rome—some of which are declared by the same Church of England to be blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits. The Church of England therefore, as a Church of Christ, may be said to exist only in name. The Body called the Church of England, is in point of fact, two Churches; in doctrine and in worship divided, they are one only as an establishment. The Christian people of England regard this hollow union as equally dishonourable to both, and long for the time when the ascendancy shall be given to that with which the cause of truth and their own sympathies lie.

I will now proceed with the task before me, with this one preparatory explanation. After much consideration and attempting several expedients, I have come to the conclusion, that to give the details of the first Liturgy, or even to attempt a summary of its contents, would prove a tedious and perplexing operation; and to effect an examination of the five Liturgies, so as to shew the character of each, and its variation from each of the others, would present difficulties almost insuperable in a brief Lecture. To avoid the necessity of troubling you with such a process, I have availed myself of the services of a friend, who has kindly helped me to the construction of a Table, setting forth such portions of King Edward's first book as are illustrative of the subjects now under consideration, and shewing in parallel lines the alterations which have taken place at its several revisions. An inspection of this Table will give a far better idea of the subject than a verbal description of a large mass of unconnected matter could possibly convey.

I shall therefore omit any such general description, and here postponing for the present the consideration of the contents of

the Liturgy, shall wait until I have carried down the historical sketch which I propose to give to the accession of Queen Elizabeth, when the third revision took place, and shall then only select a few portions of each of the formularies, for the purpose of shewing, by way of example, the leading tendency and distinctive character of each of them.

The Reign of Henry the VIII. was distinguished by an intellectual activity which had been heretofore unknown in England; an activity not confined to any particular department of human thought or action, but generally extending to Arts, Literature, and Morals; but that which renders this period peculiarly interesting to us on the present occasion, is its association with the Reformation of the Church of England. The Bible had been translated into English by Wickliffe, one hundred and thirty years before this time—the Reformation itself, therefore, had long since commenced—and a large body of the people had received the knowledge of the Scriptures, and adopted the genuine faith of Christ and his Apostles. From the early period when the Church of Rome obtained her evil ascendancy in this island, down to this Reign, the Church of England had been accustomed to celebrate her services in a language generally unknown to the people; whilst the services themselves had now become so corrupted from the comparative purity in which they were first composed, that it may be doubted whether their mysterious concealment under a foreign tongue was any serious loss to the worshippers. The Religious Reformation of England, therefore, although it had made large progress in the Kingdom, was as yet unconnected with the Established Church, which still remained in doctrine and in worship wholly identified with the Church of Rome, and consequently opposed by interest and on principle to the advancing light around her. "It pleased God to call by His grace unto the knowledge of His Son Jesus Christ" Cranmer, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, who in the year 1537, officially superintended the publication of Coverdale's translation of the Scriptures. This was, I believe, the first public and unequivocal act of sympathy between the Reformation and the Church of England; the previous withdrawal of the Supremacy and the appellate jurisdiction from Rome, having been acts rather of a political than a religious character.

"It was wonderful," says an ancient writer, "to see with what joy this Book was received all over England. God's word was read by the common people, who resorted eagerly to the places where it was appointed to be publicly read; every

one who could, bought the book, and many persons in the decline of life learnt to read on purpose."

A Reformation in the Church of England did not long delay to follow this spreading love and appreciation of the truth. A Royal Order was published, calling in for examination the Mass Books and Liturgies then in use, for the purpose of purging them from all apocryphas, feigned legends, and the names and memories of modern Saints. A second order followed, complaining of the negligence of the Clergy, and calling on them to obey the injunctions issued. Preparatory to a more general Reform of the Church Services, there appeared in the years 1536 and 1543, two documents, with the authorship of which Cranmer is believed to have been connected, the one entitled the "Institution of a Christian Man," the other "A Necessary Doctrine of a Christian Man;" these documents, although containing but imperfect lessons on the topics on which they treated, were no doubt highly assisstant to the progress of Christian knowledge.

In 1545 an English translation of the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and Ten Commandments, issued from the press, with authority to be used in morning and evening public prayer. This was I think the first step taken in the actual reformation of the Prayer Book.

The ritual of the Church shortly afterwards underwent some slight modification, which was accompanied by a cautious ordinance to explain and justify the change. The alterations in the Missals and Breviaries were so inconsiderable however, that there was no occasion for a new impression,—for "by the rasures of Becket's Office, and some other Saints struck out by the King's injunction,—by these and some other deletions, the old Liturgic Books were allowed to serve." It is possible it was thought the change of the Mass Books, and others of that kind, might have been "too great a charge upon the parishes, and it may be the people might have fancied their religion changed, and a new worship put upon them, if the Service Books had been taken away." But whatever was the reason the people had their old rituals continued, and the Churches were furnished with no new books for Divine service during this reign.

Cranmer was an apt representative of the times in which he lived: bred up and educated in the Church of Rome he put off by degrees, as God opened his eyes, the errors of that Church, and finally adopted the religion of Jesus as taught in the sacred Scriptures; and in his transit from darkness to light

his opinions are found at different times conflicting, and to a careless reader highly inconsistent.

After a full and interesting acknowledgment of the superstitions and errors in which he was brought up, he adds—"But after it had pleased God to shew unto me by His holy word a more perfect knowledge of his Son Jesus, from time to time, as I grew in knowledge of him, by little and little I put away my former ignorance."

During the reign of Henry VIII the Reformation was struggling with many difficulties: public opinion was weak and divided; every year, however, added to its strength, and finally with the new reign of Edward the public sentiment in favour of reform had grown so as to demand its expression by a law, and for the first time to find its way into the Statute Book, that faithful chronicler of the principles, manners, and habits of the times, recording as it does the practice of universal state interference, from the manufacture of Pins to the regulation of the nation's Faith.

The legal Reformation, therefore, began with this reign.

I have already mentioned the distinction to be observed between the Reformation of Religion in England and the Reformation of the Church of England, and have referred to the more ancient title justly claimed by the former.

The Reformation of the Church which was now at hand comprehended a large portion, but by no means the whole of the friends and advocates of a Scriptural Reform.

The Governors of the Church never advanced its general reformation, so far as to annihilate the desire for further improvement, consequently from the period when the first revised service of the Church was established, a marked distinction was brought to light between those of the nation, who were satisfied with it, and those who still sought a further change, and who were commonly denominated the Puritan or dissenting party.

And here I will ask you to bear in mind two facts—1st. That this party differed in sentiment from modern nonconformists in the following two important particulars: first, they were friendly to Episcopacy; and, secondly, they maintained the belief that it was the Christian duty of the Civil Governor to patronize and to maintain the public worship of God; and consequently they upheld the principle of a Church Establishment.

Hence it will always be borne in mind that in the struggles *and contentions* to which I shall shortly have to advert, and *throughout the whole period* comprised in the present Lecture,