

**OXFORD CHURCH TEXT
BOOKS. THE
HISTORY OF THE BOOK OF
COMMON PRAYER**

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Oxford Church Text Books. The History of the Book of Common Prayer by J. H. Maude

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Oxford Church Text Books

The History of the
Book of Common Prayer

BY

THE REV. J. H. MAUDE, M.A.

EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF S. ALBANS

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THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

CHAPTER I

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

The Book of Common Prayer.—To English churchmen of the present day it appears a most natural arrangement that all the public services of the Church should be included in a single book. The addition of a Bible supplies them with everything that forms part of the authorised worship, and the only unauthorised supplement in general use, a hymn book, is often bound up with the other two within the compass of a tiny volume. It was, however, only the invention of printing that rendered such compression possible, and this is the only branch of the Church that has effected it. In the Churches of the West during the Middle Ages, a great number of separate books were in use; but before the first English Prayer Book was put out in 1549, a process of combination had reduced the most necessary books to five, viz. the *Missal* (properly *Missale Plenarium*), which contained all that was necessary for the Mass; the *Breviary*, which contained the daily offices now compressed into the English Matins and Evensong; the *Manual*, a collection of occasional offices for the use of a parish priest; the *Pontifical*, which contained those services in which a bishop had to officiate; and the *Processional*, containing the Litanies.

2 BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

The Missal was formed from a combination of several separate books. The Sacramentary contained the prayers of the Mass, that is, the Canon, or prayer of Consecration, which was invariable, and also the collects, secrets, prefaces, and post-communions. The Lectionary (also called Epistolary, Apostolus, or Comes) contained the Epistles, and the Evangelistarium the Gospels. The Gradale contained the Graduals, or psalms sung between the Epistle and Gospel, and often other sung parts of the service. The Troper contained the Tropes, verses sung with the Introit, and also the Sequences, hymns sung after the Gradual.

The Breviary was commonly called in England the Portiforium, probably because it was originally portable. Earlier separate books were the Psalter, the Antiphoner, which comprised not only antiphons, but also responds, hymns, capitula, etc., which again were sometimes in separate books, the Legenda, which contained all the passages read at Matins, these being again sometimes distributed among several books, and the Ordinal or Pica de Sarum. This last book, called the Pie because the initial letters were written in red, and so presented a 'pied' appearance, gave the rules for finding the proper office for the day, as affected by the movable feasts. The complete Breviary was arranged in four parts. First there was the Kalendar, with rules for finding Easter; secondly, the Psalter and Common of Saints: the Psalter containing the psalms with the antiphons, canticles, hymns, etc., used at ordinary times: the Common of Saints containing common forms for Apostles, Confessors, etc.; thirdly, the Temporal, in which there were the variable parts, such as antiphons, responds, etc., for Sundays and week-days, and the lessons for Matins; and fourthly, the Proper of Saints, which gave the variable parts for all Saints' Days.

The Manual contained the offices for Baptism, Matrimony, the Churching of Women, the Visitation of the Sick, Extreme Unction, Burial, and a number of Benedictions. The Confirmation office was also included, although this properly belonged to the Pontifical.

The Pontifical had services for Ordination, Confirmation, Coronation, the Dedication of Churches, the Profession of Monks, etc., and many Benedictions.

Changes under Henry VIII.—All the services contained in the books which have been mentioned were still in use, with very slight changes, at the end of the reign of Henry VIII. The king was exceedingly cautious in introducing changes which affected the religious faith and practices of the people. In repudiating the authority of the pope he had on the whole the sympathy of the nation; in destroying the monasteries he was aided by the jealousy of the secular clergy and the greed of his

courtiers, but he had no sympathy with Lutheranism or Zwinglianism, and he either did not wish or did not venture to tamper to any great extent with the religion of daily life. Still some steps were taken which shew that conservative and cautious reforms of the service books were in contemplation, and particularly that the use of the English language, the elimination of abuses, and the application of the test of antiquity were intended. Already in 1535 the name of the pope, and in 1538 that of S. Thomas of Canterbury, were erased from the service books. Coverdale's English translation of the Bible was allowed to be circulated in 1536, and the Great Bible was authorised by the king in 1538, and ordered to be placed in the churches. Manuals of Christian doctrine, known as the Bishops' Book and the King's Book, were authorised in 1537 and 1543. S. Thomas's shrine was destroyed in 1538 and the superstitious use of images and lights forbidden. In 1542 Convocation made a step towards uniformity by prescribing the Sarum use for the whole province of Canterbury. In the following year, 1543, it ordered lessons from the English Bible to be read at Matins and Vespers, and in the same Convocation the archbishop, Cranmer, declared that the king would have all books purged of the bishop of Rome's name, superstitious legends expunged, and a service made out of Scripture and 'authentic doctors.' A committee was to be appointed to do the work, but probably Convocation was unwilling to act, for nothing came of this; and Cranmer probably went on by himself, for two schemes of daily offices have been discovered drawn up by him, which shew the process by which the Sarum offices were condensed into the Matins and Evensong of 1549. The only English service, however, that was brought into use in Henry's reign was the Litany, which was translated by Cranmer from the Sarum 'Processions,' with omissions and additions, and ordered by the king to be used in 1544. It has remained almost unaltered to the present day.

The Reign of Edward VI.—The accession of Edward VI. opened the floodgates of change. The government fell entirely into the hands of unprincipled men, who cared

nothing for religion themselves, but had grown rich upon the plunder of the Church, and considered it their best policy to encourage the extreme Protestant party as the best way of securing their ill-gotten gains. The party of moderate reform, to which the best of the bishops belonged, were driven into opposition by the violence of the extremists, and were almost deprived of influence. Before the end of the reign they were mostly in prison. The reform of the services fell principally into the hands of Cranmer. He possessed some notable qualifications for the task. He was pious and learned, and possessed the faculty of adapting and translating ancient devotional language with exceptional felicity. But his weakness of character made him throughout the whole of his public life the tool of natures stronger than his own, and he continually played the part of advocate to measures of which his better reason and conscience disapproved. However much we may deplore many of the steps that were taken during this reign, it is still a matter for profound thankfulness, when all the circumstances are considered, that the result was such as it was.

Changes under Edward VI.—On Edward's accession a book of Homilies was published and various injunctions issued by the Council, the first of a series which restricted to some extent the use of the old services, forbade many ancient ceremonies, and set on foot the work of destruction of all that was beautiful in the churches, a work which continued throughout the reign, and which was only too completely carried out. In the first session of Parliament, which met November 4, 1547, a bill 'for the Sacrament of the Altar' was passed. This had two parts, one forbidding the insults to the Sacrament which were now common, and the other ordering the communion of the people in both kinds. About this time a number of questions about the Eucharist were addressed to the bishops, and their replies are extant. One of the questions was whether the Mass should be in English. In March 1548 the Council issued an 'Order of Communion' in English to be used on Easter Day. This Order, derived mainly from Lutheran sources, consisted of an