

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

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ARTHUR PENRHYN STANLEY

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*WITH A PREFACE ON
THE GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF
THE RITUAL COMMISSION*

BY

ARTHUR PENRHYN STANLEY, D.D.

DEAN OF WESTMINSTER



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PREFACE.

THE FOLLOWING PAGES¹ relate to the present obligation to recite the Athanasian Creed in the public services, which in parish churches devolves partly on the clergyman, partly on the laity; in cathedral and collegiate churches usually on the laity. Within the last year this use has been all but unanimously² condemned by a Royal Commission appointed (amongst other objects) for the purpose of considering this question; as was expressed in strong terms by the Minister (the late Lord Derby) under whose auspices the appointment was made.

It is not chiefly with a view of urging the omission or change of this Rubric that these pages are republished. It is rather with the view of showing that such a relaxation, which in some form has become inevitable, ought to give

¹ Published (in substance) in the *Contemporary Review* of August and November 1870.

² See pp. 73-92.

offence to no reasonable or religious mind, and that in fact it has virtually received the adhesion of the representatives of all parties and schools in the Church. For this purpose of pacification and of conciliation, it has seemed to me that a brief history and description of the Athanasian Creed, and of its treatment by the Royal Commission, might not be unacceptable.

But I am unwilling, as one of that body, that it should be thought that this change, salutary and indispensable though it be, and sanctioned by the highest ecclesiastical authorities, is yet the most urgent in the recommendations of the Commission.

If the Athanasian Creed ceases to be generally read, the chief result would be felt in the relief of the many whose devotions are at present disturbed by its uncongenial notes. But there are other changes, less striking perhaps, but which would be more fruitful of consequences, for which the public opinion of the Church still more loudly calls, and of which the principles, if not the details, are sanctioned in the several Reports of the Commissioners.

Let me indicate some of these, both on account of their intrinsic concern, and also because

of the incidental interest attaching to the mode in which they were treated. Three other members of the Commission have already endeavoured to clear away some misapprehensions on this subject, and I shall, therefore, be excused if I endeavour to follow in the same path.

(1) Of all the subjects which the Commission had to discuss, the least important was that which some persons suppose to have been the only cause of its appointment, viz. the vexed interpretation of the obscure Rubric on 'the 'Ornaments of the Church and the Minister.' Not only have most of the questions therein involved been settled by the Courts of Law, but the public have generally acquiesced in their almost entire insignificance. The sense of that insignificance¹ is best expressed either by the total omission of any regulation on the subject (as in the Prayer-book of the Church of Ireland and in the Directory of the Church of Scotland), or by leaving it (as in the second and fourth Reports of the Commission) without alteration as a relic of antiquity.

(2) The New Table of Lessons, which was, in

¹ See Second Report, p. iv. (Remarks of the Solicitor-General and of the Dean of Westminster).

the judgment of many, esteemed an almost impossible undertaking, was unanimously adopted, both by the Committee appointed to make the selection, and by the whole body of the Commissioners. This unanimity was remarkable, as showing how the most diverse elements embraced by the most comprehensive of Christian Churches could be brought to an absolute agreement when they approached a question where party spirit was not involved, and where they were drawn upwards to the sacred and primitive sources above the region from which the streams of modern controversy divide. It was a natural prelude to the concord, on a still larger scale, of the scholars who have been appointed to assist in the revision of the text itself of the English Bible.

A like unanimity prevailed in regard to the occasional substitution of other Psalms for those appointed in the Psalter. Any measure including the revision of the Lectionary would be manifestly incomplete without this indispensable addition.

(3) The principle of rendering the services more flexible had already been sanctioned, in numberless instances, by popular use. The