

THE ORNAMENTS' RUBRIC

Church Association Tract 148

In the first Prayer Book of King Edward VI (A.D. 1549) the directions as to the vestures of the ministers officiating in the public services of the Church were as follows. In the saying and singing of matins and evensong, baptizing and burying, the minister was to wear a surplice. In the administration of the Holy Communion the Rubric was as follows:—

“Upon the day, and at the time appointed for the ministration of the Holy Communion, the Priest, that shall execute the Holy ministry, shall put upon him the vesture appointed for that ministration, that is to say: a white Albe, plain, with a vestment or Cope. And where there may be many Priests or Deacons, there so many shall be ready to help the Priest in the ministration, as shall be requisite; and shall have upon them likewise the vestures appointed for their ministry, that is to say, Albes with Tunicles.”

These directions were omitted from the Second Book of “King Edward (1552); and instead of them, a Rubric was inserted, immediately before the order for morning prayer, in these words:—

“And here it is to be noted, that the minister, at the time of the Communion, and at all other times in his ministration, shall use neither alb, vestment, nor cope; but . . . being a priest or deacon, he shall have and wear a surplice only.”

The Prayer Book of Elizabeth (A.D. 1559) provided that

The Minister at the time of the Communion, and at all other times of his ministration, shall use such ornaments in the church as were in use by authority of Parliament in the second year of the reign of King *Edward VI*, according to the Act of Parliament set in the beginning of this Book.”

The Act of Parliament therein referred to was Queen Elizabeth’s Act of Uniformity, 1 Eliz. c. 2, and the 25th Clause of that Act contains the following proviso:—

“Provided always and be it enacted, than such ornaments of the church and 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 VI, *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 for causes ecclesiastical, or of the Metropolitan of this realm”—(*Act of Uniformity, Liturg. Services, Eliz.* p. 32, P.S.)

The Prayer Book, therefore, refers to the Act, and the Act clearly contemplated further directions to be given by the Queen, with the advice of Commissioners or of the Metropolitan.

The Queen, with the authority required, did take “other order” by means of “The Advertisements” of 1564-5, the effect of which was to limit the cope to *cathedral* and *collegiate* churches, while the surplice was enjoined in parish churches. They make order for the vesture of the Minister in these words—

Item. In the ministration of the Holy Communion in cathedral and collegiate churches, the principal minister shall use a cope with gospeller and epistoller agreeably; and at all other prayers to be said at that communion table, to use no copes but surplices. * * *

“*Item.* That every minister saying any public prayers, or ministering the *sacraments* or other rites of the Church, shall wear a comely surplice with sleeves, to be provided at the charge of the parish.”—*Cardwell, Doc. Ann.*

There is no doubt that the Advertisements were carried into effect as legally binding, and were enforced by Royal Commissions; and their authority is expressly recognized by the Twenty-fourth Canon of 1603-4.

The Visitation Articles of the Archbishops and Bishops about this time, show that the operation of the Advertisements had been rapid and complete.

Archbishop *Grindal*, in 1571, inquires “whether all Vestments, Albs, Tunicles, stoles, phanons, pixes, paxes, hand-bells, sacring-bells, censers, crismatories, crosses, candlesticks, holy water stocks, images, and such other reliques and monuments of superstition and idolatrie be utterly defaced, broken, and destroyed” (Rit. Com., 2nd Rep. Appx. p. 408).

Archbishop *Parker*, in 1575, asks “in the time of celebration of Divine service whether they wear Surplices” (Rit. Com., 2nd Rep. Appx. p. 416).

Aylmer, Bishop of *London*, uses the same form of question as Archbishop *Grindal* (*Ibid.*, p. 418*b*).

Sandys, Archbishop of *York*, inquired, in 1578, “whether your Parson, Vicar, or Curate, at all times in saying the Common Prayer upon Sunday and holidays, and in administering of the Sacrament, doth use and retain the Surplice, yea or nay” (*Ibid.*, p. 422 *a*).

The Canons of 1603-4, enacted by both Convocations, and ratified by the King’s consent, provide specially for the vesture of the Minister.

Canon 24 directs the use of “a decent Cope” for the principal Minister in the Holy Communion in Cathedrals and Collegiate Churches, “according to the advertisements published Anne 7 *Eliz.*” the following is the direction contained in the Canon:—

“In all cathedral and collegiate churches, the holy communion shall be administered upon principal feast-days, sometimes by the bishop, if he be present, and sometimes by the dean, and at some times by a canon or prebendary, the principal minister using a decent cope, and being assisted with the gospeller and epistler agreeably, according to the advertisements published Anno 7 *Eliz!*”

Canon 58 directs that

Every minister saying the public prayers, or ministering the sacraments or other rites of the church, shall wear a decent and comely surplice with sleeves, to be provided at the charge of the parish. And if any question arise touching the matter, decency, or comeliness thereof, the same shall be decided by the discretion of the ordinary.”

In 1662, after the vestments had been disused by authority for more than 100 years, the rubric was revised so as to read as follows, and as thus revised it now remains:—

“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.”

In 1662 the Puritans pleaded for giving up the use of the surplice; the other party declined to allow it; and then the words, “shall be retained,” were introduced into the Rubric. On the significance of this change Sir R. Palmer, the present Lord Chancellor, wrote in 1866:—

“An enactment that certain things ‘shall be retained and be in use,’ naturally implies that the former state of things is so far to be continued; not that a new state of things is to be then introduced, or (what amounts to the same) that an old state of things long before prohibited by law, and also disused in practice, is for the future to be revived and brought into use again.”

It is possible to “retain” what we have; but it is not possible to “retain” what had been abolished one hundred years before. Nor was it possible by the use of such words as “here it is to be noted” in a rubric legally to *restore* what had been authoritatively abolished. An Act of Parliament alone could have accomplished this.

No doubt can be entertained that for nearly two centuries following 1662 the public acts of the Bishops and Clergy of the Church, and of all other official persons, were inconsistent with the supposition that the Rubric of 1662 had made any change in the law. It was not disputed by the counsel engaged in the case, that the subsequent practice in parish churches, until about 1840, was uniformly consistent with this view.