

THE DUTY OF MUTUAL TOLERATION BY PARTIES WITHIN THE CHURCH.

LETTER II.

PURSUING the subject of my first letter, I will mention one other important particular in which it is necessary, with a view to "union on the principles of the English Reformation," that our services should be used as the Church directs. I select this instance because it relates to the other great Sacrament of the Christian Church, the Administration of the Holy Communion, and because there is reason to believe that the neglect of the order of the Church in this case arises from hesitation to admit her doctrine—or to seem to recognize that which some suppose to be her doctrine. I refer to the rubric before the Prayer for the Church militant, which says "And when there is a Communion, the Priest shall then place upon the Table so much Bread and Wine, as he shall think sufficient." Then, *i.e.*, immediately after the presentation of "the alms and other devotions of the people." I understand that some maintain that the word 'then' in this Rubric does not signify 'at that point of time in the service,' but simply 'in that case'; meaning that, if there be a Communion, Bread and Wine shall be placed on the Table, there being no specification of the exact time at which this shall be done; and consequently that, if it be done *before* Morning Prayer begins, the direction of the Rubric is complied with. I do not wish to debate this question on the ground of common sense; though, if this Rubric be taken in connexion with the preceding Rubric, the argument from common sense appears to me to be irrefragable; and is, I know, frankly admitted to be so by many who call themselves Low Churchmen. I will rather appeal to an authority which few will dispute, where the mere logical and grammatical import of words is involved. When the case of *Westerton v. Liddell* was brought by appeal before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, one of the charges against Mr. Liddell was his use of a credence-table. The judgment of the Judicial Committee on this point was, in effect, as follows: That it was, beyond all question, the duty of the officiating minister to place the Bread and Wine on the Table at that point of the service at which the Rubric stands, *viz.* after the reading of the offertory sentences and the presentation of the alms, and *before* the Prayer for the Church Militant; and, that, this being the case, any provision was lawful which might conduce to the performance of this indispensable duty, with convenience and decorum. On this ground the Committee allowed the credence table, not as a thing prescribed for its own sake; but as a mean, either necessary or expedient, for the due discharge of a plain unquestionable obligation. In some churches the vestry might be distant from the chancel, and the conveyance of the elements thence by the minister or by others would cause an unseemly interruption of the service, and in this case the credence-table might be regarded as necessary; and even where the vestry was close at hand, it might be fairly regarded as

expedient, in order that the public worship might not be encumbered by needless ceremonies, and that the risk of mistake or accident might be avoided. The rubric, however, enjoins *only* the placing of the elements on the Table at that time, and says nothing as to the mode by which that action of the minister is to be facilitated. I know that some years since in the parish church of Frome, Somersetshire, the churchwardens observed an immemorial custom of passing into the vestry, after bringing the alms to the Priest, and bringing thence the Bread and Wine, and delivering them likewise to him as he stood within the Chancel rails; and I imagine that no one would wish to disturb a good old custom like this, but would rather delight to see the lay representatives of the congregation associated with their minister in this act of service.

I believe that the term "credence table" has alarmed many by its unwonted mysterious sound, it may be well therefore to bear in mind, first, that it is a *secular* as well as an ecclesiastical term, that it means nothing more than 'side-board,' the place at which, when poisoning was too frequently practised both on guests and on masters, the *taster* pledged, by his own receiving of the food or of the cup, the safety of those who should afterwards partake of it—thus *accrediting* or giving testimonial to the viands: and, secondly, that the credence table is a merely secondary and indifferent thing, and that we ask nothing more than that the plain direction of the rubric, as recognized by the highest legal authority, be complied with. If it be true that "he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much," we should be very careful not to give offence to others, or to draw unnecessary lines of demarcation between ourselves and others, even in that which may seem to be a very small matter, but nevertheless affects the most solemn act of our Christian worship. As the Church designs that our alms shall be hallowed every Lord's Day, by being presented on the Holy Table, with the prayer that God would "most mercifully accept them," (a design which, let us remember, is rudely and undutifully frustrated, where the Prayer for the Church Militant is not used); so also, beyond all question, the Church designs that we shall offer to God those elements of bread and wine, which are afterwards, in the Prayer of Consecration, to be sanctified, by having our Lord's own words pronounced over them, to a most holy purpose, so that we, "receiving them, may be partakers of His most blessed Body and Blood."

There can be little doubt that our Church meant distinctly to recognize, by this rubric, the practice of the early Church of making to Almighty God, as the Creator of the world, a material oblation of the first-fruits of His creatures—of "bread to strengthen man's heart" and of wine "which makes glad the heart of man." And no dread of later errors can possibly justify neglect of the plain injunction of our church; if conscience be pleaded for such neglect we are compelled to reply that the plea is inadmissible, and that it should, far rather, have been urged as a

reason for not assuming an office, the assumption of which binds him who holds it, by every tie of truthfulness and honour, to discharge, with scrupulous fidelity, the duties for which he has consented to make himself responsible. We need not, moreover, despair of explaining to the simplest understanding how widely the oblation of the unconsecrated elements differs from the oblation *after* consecration; or, again, how totally different in meaning was this latter oblation, as practised in the early church, from that so-called offering, which our church emphatically rejects, and which implies a repetition, or a continuation, of the one great offering upon the cross. Let us not forget the scandal which must inevitably ensue from diverse usage here:—How they, who comply with the rule of the Church, must be grieved and disturbed by seeing it infringed, at a time, and in a matter so sacred: and, again, how the neglect of the rule, by some of the ministers of the Church, may cause those who dutifully obey it, to be regarded with most unjust suspicion, simply because they do so. It is very hard indeed that a man should be denounced as disloyal to the church simply because he studiously obeys her instructions; and that, by those who no less studiously refuse to comply with them.

It must be remembered also that "Union on the Principles of the English Reformation" may be frustrated, not only by neglecting to do what the Church enjoins, but also by adventuring to do that which she neither prescribes by direct enactment, nor authorizes by traditional custom. If we examine the question calmly and dispassionately, all will admit that there are usages most decent and edifying, which are not prescribed by written rubrics, and that consequently we cannot, in every instance, appeal to the *litera scripta*, as interpreting the mind of the Church and our own duty as her members. I will mention the practice, happily common to us all, without distinction of party, of rising at the opening of Morning and Evening Prayer, and continuing to stand until we kneel to say the general Confession; and, again, the very seemly custom of standing during the reading of the Exhortation in the Communion office, neither of which usages is prescribed by any rubric. I believe, however, that very little difficulty will present itself to any willing and obedient mind, in determining *what* those unwritten usages of the Church are, which are either absolutely binding upon us all, or may be observed by some without any shadow of offence to others. It may be assumed, then, that all these things lie within the domain, which they who would promote the union of which we are speaking, may safely regard as their own lawful heritage; remembering, in any case of possible doubt, the resort, which is enjoined, in the Preface to our Prayer Book, to the Bishop of the Diocese. But this "goodly heritage" has its bounds, beyond which some are disposed to pass, according to their several inclinations, in one direction or in another. Some would venture to "go out of bounds" in the direction of what they call "our common Protestantism," and to introduce into the church practices borrowed