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Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

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Anglo-Saxon Porch, Monkwearmouth Church, Durham.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE INTERNAL ARRANGEMENT OF CHURCHES PREVIOUS
TO THE REFORMATION.

NOTWITHSTANDING the spoliation of our English churches, especially of those of conventual foundation, in the reign of Henry the Eighth, and the changes effected in the ritual and

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[More information](#)

ceremonies of the Church in the reign of Edward the Sixth, and the destructive violence occasioned by the Puritans in the middle of the seventeenth century, and still more the unnecessary and wanton destruction of many vestiges of ecclesiastical and historic interest in these later times, occasioned by the so-called restoration of our churches, without any conservative feeling, our ancient churches still retain relics of the past, not as yet swept entirely away. These point to usages in religious worship, with which our ancestors were familiar, but which, some having been abrogated, and others differing in many respects from the liturgical rites of the Reformed Church, cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of the former discipline of the Church, and of the services connected with it. As historic reminiscences, however, the vestiges thus left are not without their interest and value.

Though so early as the fourth century, we meet with a variety of liturgical offices in use in the Eastern Church, which, differing from one another in minute particulars, agree in general and essential points, the formation of such liturgies is not to be ascribed to the period at which they are first found reduced into writing, but to usages of much higher antiquity, the origin of which we are perhaps hardly able to trace, though they were early considered to be coeval, or nearly so, with the apostolic age.* For the discipline and mystical rites of the Primitive Church during the three first centuries, when it

* From Justin Martyr's account of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, it is evident that there was in his time a set form of public worship. His first apology was written within half-a-century of the death of the apostle St. John.

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was struggling against persecution, being performed in secret, were imparted by mere oral communication; and the most important to the faithful only, or those fully admitted into the Church, whilst the catechumens, or those converts who still remained in a state of probation, were, after the performance of a certain portion of the accustomed service, dismissed, and not allowed to remain to be partakers of the more solemn rites.

Justin Martyr adverts to the custom of the Christians turning to the east in prayer, and adds that the Church received from the apostles the mode and place of prayer.^b

Tertullian, who wrote at the close of the second, and early in the third century, alludes to certain of the mystical ceremonies of the Christians as having been betrayed to strangers, and amongst these he mentions the custom of making the sign of the cross on the body: and Basil, Bishop of Cæsarea, circa A.D. 370, speaks of the mystical rules and discipline of the Church as originating partly from unwritten doctrine, and partly from apostolical tradition; and amongst the observances then in use, which had been traditionally handed down, and were of unknown antiquity, he particularises the trine baptismal immersion, the signing with the sign of the cross, the turning toward the east in prayer, and the use of a solemn form of words beyond those contained in the Scripture, both before and after the exhibition of

^b In primis Justin, ad Orthodoxos respond, ad quæst. 118. ait, "ideo Christianos omnes precum tempore spectare ad Orientem" ... additque in fine, "Ecclesiam a sanctis Apostolis orandi morem et locum accepisse." *Duranti De Ritibus Ecclesiæ L. l. c. III.*

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the bread of the Eucharist, and the cup of blessing ; and he observes that these and many other mysteries were derived from the unwritten doctrine of a concealed and mystical tradition.^c

The Constitutions known by the title "Apostolical," which were written about the close of the third, or early in the fourth century, contain a formulary of the Eucharistic service, as then observed in the Eastern Church. Amongst the rites referred to in this most ancient liturgy, which is also called the "Clementine," may be noticed the kiss of peace, according to the apostolical injunction, whence originated the pax of silver at a much later period presented to be kissed ;^d the ablution of hands before the offertory, originating from a Jewish rite, and the admixture of water with the wine in the cup of the Eucharist, a custom of immemorial tradition.^e The priest also wore a white or shining garment, and in the communion the mystical elements, in both kinds, were partaken of by all the faithful.^f

The origin of the Roman liturgy is involved in some obscurity ; it has been partly ascribed to Leo and Ge-

^c De Spiritu sancto, ad Amphilochium c. XXVII.

^d The Pax was used at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth.

^e The mixed cup in the Eucharist is expressly mentioned by Justin Martyr. It was enjoined in the Order of Communion, set forth in the reign of Edward the Sixth, A.D. 1547. It was likewise enjoined in the first Liturgy of the Reformed Church of England, A.D. 1549. This custom was never expressly abrogated, though in the Liturgy of 1552 and subsequent Liturgies wine only was required for the cup. I am at a loss to find the reason for the change.

^f The ancient Greek Liturgies of the Eastern Church have within the last few years been edited and translated into English by the late Rev. J. M. Neale, D.D., and the Rev. R. F. Littledale, LL.D., rendering them more easily accessible than the more costly work of Renaudot.

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lasius, both of whom flourished in the fifth century, though the latter Pontiff appears rather to have added to an old office than composed an entire new one. Gregory the Great, who flourished a century after Gelasius, revised it, and added considerably to the services and rites of the Church.^s Much of the substance of the ancient liturgies of the East may be found comprised in that contained in the Sacramentary of Gregory; yet the order of the service is different, and the form of the latter subsequently prevailed generally throughout the West, and appears to have been introduced into Britain by Gregory himself, through Augustine. The Gregorian liturgy in order and substance, but with divers additional prayers and forms, has ever since been followed by most of the Churches in communion with that of Rome; and though the rituals of many of those Churches differ in the *ordo missæ* or ordinary of the mass, that variable part which precedes the preface, the canon of the mass, which follows it, with some additions to the post communion, continued nearly the same, word for word, as that compiled or revised by Gregory.

Prior to the arrival of Augustine towards the close of the sixth century, the ancient liturgy of the British Church is supposed to have been the same as, or derived from, that of the Gallican Church.^h From the time of Augustine to the Reformation the liturgies of

^s These three Liturgies are contained in a folio volume, edited by Muratori, and entitled, *Liturgia Romana Vetus Tria Sacramentaria Complectens, Leonianum scilicet, Gelasianum, Et Antiquum Gregorianum*, published at Venice, A.D. 1748.

^h The ancient Gallican Liturgy, *De Liturgia Gallicana*, was edited and commented on by the learned Mabillon, and published at Paris, A.D. 1729.

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the English Church were derived from that of Gregory, probably at first with little or no alteration. Subsequently in different districts a variety of offices prevailed. Of these the most noted was that contained in the service book known as *The Use of Sarum*, compiled by Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury, about the close of the eleventh century. This use or service was adopted throughout the greater part of England; though the cathedrals of York, Lincoln, Hereford, and Bangor had also their several uses or forms of worship, varying in some respects from that of Sarum, but the canon was the same in all.¹ It is with reference to these, and other occasional observances, that we should view the peculiar appendages which still exist in many of our ancient churches.

During the first two centuries of the Christian era we have little notice, owing perhaps to the persecutions which then prevailed, of material buildings, purposely erected and set apart for Divine worship. In the early part of the third century, however, traces appear of distinct buildings, *ἐκκλησιᾶ*, *domus Dei*, appropriated for the purpose of Christian service, and these were not few in number, though the records we have of them are scanty. About the year 240 of the Christian era, Gregory Thaumatergus is recorded to have built a church or structure, for religious worship, of more than ordinary proportions, at Neocæsarea.

In the pseudo-Apostolical Constitutions or Canons,

¹ Both the ordinary and canon of the mass according to the use of Sarum, with the ceremonies used thereat before the Reformation, were translated by Fox, and appear in his Martyrology.

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written probably in the latter part of the third, or early in the fourth century, we have some slight account of the plan and arrangement of these sacred edifices; "Let the building be long, with its head to the east, with its vestries on both sides, at the east end, and so it will be like a ship."^{*}

At the commencement of the fourth century, in the tenth and last general persecution, by the edict of Dioclesian, that the churches should be levelled with the ground, many were destroyed.

Soon after the cessation of this persecution many churches were built, and not a few heathen temples were converted into churches.

Eusebius, in his panegyric on the building of the churches, addressed to Paulinus, Bishop of Tyre, by whose zeal principally the church of Tyre, at that time by far the most noble of the Christian structures in Phœnicia, was built, after describing generally the plan and mode of construction of that edifice, proceeds to say,—“For when he (the builder) had thus completed the temple, he also adorned it with lofty thrones, in honour of those who preside, and also with seats decently arranged in order throughout the whole, and at last placed the holy altar in the middle; and that this again might be inaccessible to the multitude, he inclosed it with framed lattice work, accurately wrought with ingenious sculpture, presenting an admirable sight to the beholders.”

Ἐφ' ἅπασί τε τὸ τῶν ἁγίων ἅγιον θυσιαστήριον ἐν μεσφθεὶς αὐθις καὶ τὰδε ὡς ἂν εἴη τοῖς πολλοῖς ἄβατα, τοῖς ἀπὸ ξύλου

^{*} Whiston's Translation.

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*περιέφραττε δικτύους εἰς ἄκρον ἐντέχρον λειτουργίας ἐξησηκμη-
νοῖς ὡς θαυμάσιον τοῖς ὀρώσι παρέχειν τὴν θέαν.*

Thus early in the fourth century the distinction between the different portions of a church, the body and sanctuary, which we now designate as nave, and chancel, or choir, is shewn to have existed.

Few and brief are the notices by St. Chrysostom and Gildas, of the religious structures used for worship by the ancient British Church. The altars therein only are mentioned, and of such structures we have now no visible traces. From the time of Augustine to the Norman conquest, the Anglo-Saxon churches appear from existing remains to have been small compared with the Norman churches. Some consisted of a nave and chancel only, as at Wittering and Bradford-on-Avon; many had a tower westward of the nave; some had aisles, as at Brixworth and Repton; some were built in the form of a cross, with transepts, as at Worth, and Stanton Lacey, and Stow, Lincolnshire; some terminated with a semi-circular apse, as the original chancel at Brixworth; some with a polygonal apse, as at Wing. Most, however, appear to have been rectangular at the east end. Some had the tower between the chancel and nave, as at Wootton-Wawen; some had crypts or subterraneous passages, as at Repton, Hexham, Ripon, and Wing; a few had projecting porches, as at Bradford-on-Avon. All had the chancel pointing eastward.

Four churches in the north of England, Hexham, Ripon, Jarrow, and Monkwearmouth, all erected in the seventh century, all noticed and described by ancient writers, still retain vestiges of their original construc-

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tion. The two former were built by Archbishop Wilfrid, the two latter by Benedict Biscopus. Richard, Prior of Hexham, circa A.D. 1180, describes the building of that church, A.D. 674. The substructure consisted of crypts and subterraneous oratories and winding passages. The apse was adorned with histories and images, and figures sculptured in relief on the stone, and coloured paintings. In the oratories, both within and beneath the church, altars were constructed in honour of the blessed Virgin, of St. Michael, of St. John the Baptist, of the holy Apostles and others; relics of saints, books, vestments and utensils of the church were numerous. Such another church could not at the time of its erection be found on this side the Alps.¹ Some of the winding passages of the church built by Wilfrid are still accessible inside of the present church. These, constructed of materials from some old Roman building, have been only partially cleared out. The monastic church of Ripon was likewise built by Wilfrid. Some vaulted passages and small chambers are all the vestiges of the original church. Benedict Biscopus, A.D. 676, built the church of the monastery of Monkwearmouth, having sent for masons from Gaul, to construct it of stone after the Roman manner. He also sent to Gaul for glass factors, to glaze the windows; and he decorated it with paintings of the blessed Virgin and the twelve Apostles, with subjects taken from the Evangelists, and the visions of the Apocalypse, with these the walls were covered. He obtained also from abroad sacred vessels and vestments, and from Rome

¹ Eich. Pr. Hag. int. X Scriptores.

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a multitude of books and relics."^m The tower of this church and the porch still remains, together with some rude sculptured ornaments. The church of the monastery of Jarrow, likewise erected by Benedict Biscop, was completed and dedicated A.D. 685. This church the founder decorated with paintings representing corresponding events in the Old and New Testament, such as Isaac carrying the wood on which, being bound, he was placed, and our Lord bearing his cross. The brazen serpent uplifted in the wilderness, and the Son of Man affixed to the cross."

The ALTARS in the Anglo-Saxon churches, as we see by illuminated MSS. had each an altar covering, and a cross standing upon them. Of the altar furniture we have an account of that presented by King Ina, A.D. 708, to one of the chapels of the abbey church, Glastonbury, amongst the costly church plate and articles, composing which, were a chalice, paten, and thurible of gold; candlesticks and a vessel for holy water of silver, images of gold and silver of our Lord, the blessed Virgin, and the twelve Apostles, and altar coverings and sacerdotal ornaments, wrought with gold and precious stones.

On entering a church through the porch on the north or south side, or at the west end, we sometimes perceive on the right hand side of the door, at a convenient height from the ground, often beneath or within a canopied niche, or *fenestella*, and partly projecting from the wall, a stone basin: this was the *stoup*, or receptacle for holy water, called also the *aspersorium*, into

^m Vita S. Benedicti, auctore Ven. Bede.

ⁿ Vita S. Benedicti, Bede.