An Historical and Explanatory Treatise On the Book of Common Prayer

Humphry William Gilson
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AN HISTORICAL
AND EXPLANATORY TREATISE
ON THE
Book of Common Prayer.

BY
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FIFTH EDITION, REVISED AND ENLARGED.

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1875.
PREFACE.

THE following pages have been composed for the use of the theological student, but not without the hope that they may also be acceptable to that large and increasing class among the laity, who desire to be intelligent as well as faithful members of the Church.

When applied to the great purpose for which it is intended, our Liturgy needs little comment; it is adapted to the wants and feelings of all; it is simple in its style, and not above the comprehension of the unlearned and the ignorant. But when studied by the light of history, it assumes a widely different aspect. It is found to be rich in memorials of the past. It derives a great part of its contents from a remote antiquity. It is a witness to the faith, the devotional habits, and sometimes to the trials and afflictions of our Christian forefathers. It bears on its surface the marks of many conflicts and controversies, which have agitated the Church in successive ages. On these accounts it may well be regarded as a great historical
monument: and the revered guide and companion of our public devotions thus becomes to us the subject of varied and interesting illustration.

If we would understand the Prayer Book thoroughly, and form a just estimate of its value, we must often turn to the Service-Books which it supplanted, and from which it was in a great measure compiled. It is instructive as well as interesting to observe how, in preparing a new manual of public devotion, the Reformers availed themselves of the Breviary, the Missal, and the Ritual; how the old Offices were rather remodelled than altogether superseded, and the formularies were in some cases literally translated, in others paraphrased, or adapted to the use of the Reformed Church. We frequently also find that a collect is placed in a new light by a reference to its Latin original. In order to encourage and facilitate this reference, most of the original forms have been inserted in the present treatise: and where no other source is acknowledged, it will be understood that they have been taken from the well-known *Origines Liturgicae* of Mr Palmer.

Among the recent liturgical works to which I have had recourse, may be mentioned Dr Cardwell’s *Documentary Annals*, and *Conferences on the Book of Common Prayer*, Bishop Mant’s and Mr Stephens’ editions of the Prayer Book, Mr Bailey’s *Rituale Anglo-Catholico*, Mr Maskell’s *Monumenta Ritualia*, Mr Clay’s *Book of Common Prayer Illustrated*, Mr Procter’s
PREFACE.


Having been a member of the Ritual Commission of 1870, and of the Committee appointed by the Commission to revise the Table of Lessons, I took upon myself when the new Lectionary had been authorised by Act of Parliament, to explain it in a short treatise, entitled "The New Table of Lessons explained" (1871). That treatise was not submitted to my colleagues before publication; but having reason to believe that it has been generally approved by them, I have appended the greater part of it to the present work, in the hope that it may be of permanent use.

A short account of the proceedings of the Ritual Commission is given in Chapter III.

W. G. H.

December, 1874.
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ON THE

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER.

CHAPTER I.

Of the Ancient Liturgies, and the liturgical books in use at the time of the Reformation.

When Cranmer and his colleagues undertook to frame a new manual of public devotion, they wisely abstained as much as possible from original composition, and preferred to make a compilation from the time-hallowed Offices of the unreformed Church. Those Offices stood greatly in need of revision; for every form of mediæval superstition and misbelief had left its impress upon them. But to cast them altogether aside was neither expedient nor desirable; for independently of the claim which long usage had given them, they still contained much that was pure and excellent, the work of venerable Christian fathers and apostolic men. Not the least among the recommendations of the Book of Common Prayer is this, that a large portion of its contents is of high antiquity, and that it is thus a connecting link between the present and the past. Such being the origin of our excellent Liturgy, its structure cannot be fully elucidated, without a frequent re-