

Liturgical Colours in Scottish Parish Churches.

It is an increasing practice in this country for the seasons of the Christian Year to be marked in parish churches by changes in the colours of the coverings of the Holy Table, of the pulpit "fall" and, in many cases, of the book markers. Sometimes even the flowers on the Holy Table are, as far as is possible, of the colour of the season. Strictly speaking, of course, the only thing which should be changed, other than vestments, is the frontal of the Holy Table; but in Scotland we have always been prone to hesitate about changes and then, when they are made, to go to extremes with them. Thus it comes about that there are Presbyterian Churches to-day where the colour sequences, so far as church draperies are concerned, are more in evidence than in some Roman Catholic chapels.

The earliest ecclesiastical colour sequence known to historians dates from the 12th century, and was in use in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. This sequence is rather remarkable in that the colour associated with the Blessed Virgin is black. This was also the colour used on Christmas Eve, and at the Feast of the Circumcision. In the last quarter of the same century we have the sequence recorded by Innocent III. some years before he became Pope. It mentions four colours; white for joyful solemnities generally, red for Whitsunday, All Saints and the Feasts of Martyrs, black for penitential seasons and masses for the dead, and green for common days, because it was "midway between black and white." It may be said that it is from this sequence that all later ones in the Western Church are derived.

Centuries were to pass in Scotland before anything like a system was known, and even at the Reformation it was still somewhat nebulous. At Coldingham towards the end of the 14th century white was being used in Lent, and a little later we find the same usage at Aberdeen and Holyrood. The Arbutnott Missal orders red for Good Friday, which was in accordance with the use of Sarum. At Holyrood on that day the colour used was "purple," a dark red rather than the colour that we now know by that name. Black was the regular colour at services for the departed, although at King's College, Aberdeen, and at Perth, there are references to blue being used on such occasions. The inventory of the goods belonging to the Chapel Royal, Stirling, in 1505, shows that there were vestments and hangings of seven different colours, viz., black, blue, red, whitish or dun, green, white and purple. Among the red articles, it may be mentioned, are "three cloths of gold," one of which is called "precious." This was used on the festival of Corpus Christi. The other two were both old and are stated to be suitable for copes. Evidently their days as frontals were at an end.

Altogether the evidence of any systematic use of colour sequences in Scotland in pre-Reformation days is very scanty. So far as one can judge from the records it would appear that the best frontals and vestments were used at the greater festivals, without much regard to colour; while the plainer and more worn ones were brought out on ordinary days. This may be partly the explanation why there has been no legislation about colour sequences in the Reformed Church. The use of distinctive colours may be objected to by individuals, but there is nothing whatsoever in Scottish ecclesiastical law to forbid their use.

In Kirk-session records of the post-Reformation period we have quite a number of references to coverings of pulpits and desks, and it is a somewhat remarkable fact that North, South, East and West the colour selected for this purpose was green. In 1594 the Kirk-session of Glasgow got cloth of a green colour to cover the pulpits in the High (Cathedral) and Blackfriars Kirks. In Perth, some twenty years later, the pulpit was covered with "sad grene cloth," so that it might be like that in Edinburgh. At Dunfermline the Kirk-session paid £7 10s 0d for "grene clothe to cover the pulpett, with some silk waterings," and also £8 5s 0d for "grene silk to be sash to the same." The silk was woven in the town, and the total cost of the decoration was fully £21. At the coronation of Charles I. in 1633, at Holyrood, the table on which the Regalia and Great Seal were laid was covered with green velvet. Scott

of Cupar tells us that when Archbishop Gladstones held his first Diocesan Synod at St Andrews, in 1606, he sat in pomp there with "his green velvet cushion before him." During the Second Episcopacy, in 1685, we find that at Alyth green cloth with green fringes was obtained for the pulpit. Many other instances could be given.

It would be very interesting to know the reason of this preference for green. Can it have been because it was the colour of the national emblem, the thistle? Or was it a mediaeval survival dating from the day when green was the colour used at ordinary times? Some support for the latter view may be found in the fact that amongst the Huguenots green was also the favourite colour for the hangings in their churches. In 1612 the Synod of Fife ordered that the mediaeval pictures in the church of Fowlis Easter were to be painted over with green paint. After the Reformation the pillars in St. Giles', Edinburgh, were painted green. The old pulpit at Montrose had a green coloured sounding board.

Needless to say, there was no changing of the colours in Scotland in post-Reformation days to mark the seasons of the Christian Year. It was, however, customary to drape the pulpit with black as a sign of mourning, after the death of a minister, patron, or monarch. At the funeral of the Bishop of Aberdeen in 1636 the pulpit was covered with black cloth, and the city accounts show that on the following Sundays the pulpits in the city churches were similarly draped. At a later period, among the properties belonging to the Church of Banff was "a mourning cloth for the pulpit and desk." I remember seeing in the Church of Sanquhar a set of mourning draperies which were placed on the pulpit after the death of Queen Victoria, and which were said to have been got for the funeral service of her grandfather, George III., or her uncle George IV. In 1751 the black cloth which had been used to drape the pulpit at Galston on the occasion of Lady Marchmont's death was wanted to mark the death of Frederick, Prince of Wales. It could not be found, as the beadle had appropriated it.

A writer on English liturgical customs has said that even in the 18th century there was a colour sequence in Anglican churches consisting of red for all seasons except those of mourning, when black was used. Readers of Mrs Henry Wood's novels may remember that at Helstonleigh (Worcester) Cathedral the building was draped in black during Lent, in the fifties of last century, and that the choir-boys wore black surplices then and on the day of King Charles the Martyr. It is probable that from England the custom came of making the draperies of Scottish churches red instead of the native green.

About fifty years ago the late Bishop John Wordsworth, of Salisbury, one of the most learned prelates of the Anglican Church, published the following restoration of the colour sequence in his diocese, which is the ancient Sarum from which Scottish usages were believed to be derived. "In country churches two colours will be found sufficient—red and white; red for ordinary Sundays and Saints' days and ferial days generally, and white for the great Festival seasons in which we celebrate our Lord's work of redemption, and for certain other great days Certain other colours may be optional, as violet or purple for week days not Saints' days in Advent and Lent, and for seasons of fasting . . . and for funerals; and blue or green for week days not Saints' days after Trinity."

Everyone knows that on the occasion of the celebration of Holy Communion the Holy Table is covered with a white cloth. Speaking generally, two forms of this cloth have been used in the Church. One, in all probability the earlier, covers the whole Table, down to the floor. This may be seen in quite a number of mosaics of early Christian times, as well as in later illustrations. The other form covers the top of the table and the sides, but leaves the front practically uncovered. The latter is regarded by some Anglo-Catholics as "Protestant." This, however, is simply ignorance, although one regrets to see that the earlier form, which was once the usage almost everywhere in Scotland, is being set aside by those who regard the "neighbour kirk" as being the last word in correctness.

It is not uncommon to see a white frontal used on the pulpit on Communion Sunday, and there are churches where one may see the collection plates similarly draped on such occasions. I have even seen the precentor's desk with a white cloth

on the book-board. It might be somewhat difficult to discover liturgical precedent for such customs, but they are not therefore to be condemned.

Is there, then, such a thing as a Scots sequence for the Christian Year? It can be definitely stated that there is not, and never has been a sequence which has been used to the exclusion of all others. The following list, however, embodies practically all that is known of ancient Scots usage. Advent to Christmas Eve, blue; Christmas Eve to Septuagesima, white; Septuagesima to Ash Wednesday, blue; Ash Wednesday to Passion Sunday, coarse linen to represent sack-cloth—the “whitish or dun” colour of the Chapel Royal vestments (called *subalba* at Aberdeen); Passion Sunday to Easter, black (except Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, red); Easter to Trinity, white; Sundays after Trinity, green; Martyrs and All Saints, red. Red is sometimes used on Whitsunday, but I have not been able to find any Scots precedent for it. At the Chapel Royal in 1505 there was an “old frontlet of silk of diverse colours, bearing various arms wrought thereon and of moderate value.” It is probable that this was used on All Saints Day. For Baptism, Marriage, and Ordination the colour is white. There is some evidence that green, being the symbol of fertility, was sometimes used at marriages.

It is frequently stated that yellow may be considered the ecclesiastical equivalent of green, and may be used as an alternative. Whatever may have been the case elsewhere, this does not appear to have been so in Scotland. Violet, regarded as the equivalent of black, does not seem to have been used much in Scotland until recent times. It is probable that in many places green was used from Septuagesima to Easter, at least for ordinary Sundays. This is still the Roman use.

A rather interesting example of using the “best cloth” on an occasion of special rejoicing is to be found at the Baptism of Prince Henry, at the Chapel Royal, Stirling, in 1594. We learn from a contemporary writer that the pulpit was decked with a cloth of gold. We do not know whether this cloth was one of the relics of the pre-Reformation Chapel; but we do know that amongst the possessions of the Chapel was at least one which might have been used, and that it was in existence less than ninety years before.

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THE PRAYER OF ALL CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

Congregations should be given more encouragement to join audibly in the Lord's Prayer during Divine Service. Curiously enough, in day schools and Sunday Schools and Woman's Guilds the prayer is invariably joined in heartily and by all; whereas, in many cases, in the ordered worship of the Church, the congregation remains silent, or almost so. Prejudice, doubtless, operates here, or perhaps a larger building has a subduing effect. The Minister, however, is not always blameless. There is a tendency, sometimes, for him to give so much care to the devout rendering of the prayer that he makes it difficult for the people to accompany him with any confidence. When a prayer is spoken in unison a regular tempo must be maintained throughout, otherwise there is hesitancy and confusion. The writer recently had the privilege of worshipping in a church where the choir and congregation had obviously been carefully trained in this regard. Every phrase was crisply spoken as a corporate prayer, and the effect was deeply impressive and reverent. Speaking too slowly is just as much a deterrent to others as speaking too quickly, and in this prayer, so familiar to all, there should be no need for the Minister to obtrude his own voice unduly, if the congregation are alive to their privilege and responsibility and repeat the prayer with him in a clearly audible voice, and not in a subdued whisper.