

Ministerial Deportment or Actions.

WHILE many service-books give certain necessary directions as to what ministers should or should not do in conducting public worship, there are a number of important details which usually escape consideration in such manuals. There are right and wrong ways of doing most things, and while mere *minutiae* should not be magnified, we must avoid thinking that ‘nothing matters.’ Our people are not the experts we ought to be, yet they like to see things done decently and in order; and it is eminently desirable that even the minor details of Divine service should be duly studied and correctly performed.

ORDINARY CHURCH SERVICES

It is well to arrive at the vestry in good time to robe without undue hurry. Leaving aside the general question of vestments, one may express a caveat against ragged or outworn articles of wear. It is surely proper to be as decently dressed for the sanctuary as for the street,—or even more so. Gown and bands, at least, should be *de rigueur*. Entrance into the church should be dignified without being theatrical. It is fitting to kneel for private supplication, in the pulpit or at the prayer-desk. At the beginning, or during the service, there may be an impulse to survey the assemblage, but one should beware of what Dr G. H. Morrison deprecated as “the wandering eye.” Let the minister seem (as he should really be) intent on worshipping God. Except for reasons of rest, he should stand throughout; but if he wishes to rest during one singing, let him do so during that before sermon. While standing during singing he should cultivate repose of deportment, avoiding all restless movements due to nervousness or self-consciousness.

In prayer most of our ministers stand, though some kneel on a stool or board. The hands are usually clasped, though some extend them with supine palms upward. To raise one hand aloft rather suggests quelling the people or blessing them. It is customary, though not

incumbent, to close the eyes. If prayers are read, a steady position of the head should be maintained.

During the praise the minister should endeavour to join in the singing, without doing so ostentatiously or as if he were the precentor. If he cannot sing let him follow the words on the page, holding the book steadily until the very conclusion of the Amen.

With regard to the lessons it should be frankly recognised that the reader is *reading*, not reciting the passage nor delivering a discourse. This means that his eye should be entirely, or almost entirely, fixed upon the page; and that he should not glance with frequency towards the listeners as if the Scripture were his own composition or his own utterance. His personality should be humbly suppressed in the presence of the Word of God, as though he were hearing the Word for himself as well as giving it to the listeners. After announcing he should not plunge instantly into the reading, without allowing some seconds of time in which the worshippers may turn up the place. Some ministers measure this time by themselves turning up the place along with the people. At the conclusion of the reading it is not necessary to close the Bible.

Gesture in preaching is too wide a subject for this article. (There are useful handbooks of gesture.) Meaningless or ungainly gestures are worse than none at all. Holding of hands in pockets is sternly to be deprecated as being both religiously irreverent and disrespectful to the congregation. Short cassocks with side pockets encourage this bad habit. Nor is it necessary to hold on by the desk, as if one required such physical support. The carriage of the head should be free from two common faults—that of drooping it too low and that of throwing it back. ‘Tilting the chin’ was deprecated by Sir F. A. Benson in an address to the clergy. The inclination to drop the head occurs when the sermon is delivered from manuscript, and may be avoided by letting the eye merely, and not the head, fall towards the page.

In giving the Benediction the usual Scottish custom is to raise both hands (as in the picture “The Ordination”). Jesus “lifted up His hands and blessed them.” Blessing with three fingers of one hand is more Roman and Anglican than Presbyterian. The action should symbolise a blessing, not a prayer. The minister is to “bless the people from God” (Westminster Directory). He should

not bow his head as if he were amongst the recipients of the blessing.

The service ended, the minister or ministers leave the church before the people do so. Where the offering is brought up to the Table by the office-bearers the minister should receive it and place it on the Table.

THE SACRAMENTS—BAPTISM

Since a distinctive feature of a sacrament is symbolic action, the due performance of the actions should be carefully attended to. (The people, according to The Larger Catechism, are "heedfully to observe the elements and the actions.")

With respect to Baptism, a ministerial friend of the writer first goes to the vestry to meet the baptismal party, and precedes them as he brings them into the church. If there is a font (as there ought to be) as much as possible of the service may be conducted from beside the font. One of the actions performed by the celebrant may be the pouring of the water from the ewer into the font: thus the element may be made more visible and the people enabled to 'observe the element.' The minister, before pronouncing the formula, may take the child into his arms; and, as he gives words of blessing, he should raise his hand (or hands, if he is not holding the child). There is a wise medium between using too much and too little water.

THE COMMUNION

In the instance of that most solemn rite, Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper, the rubrics contained in the 'Westminster Directory,' and in various liturgies, leave little to be added by the present writer. In the 'taking' of the elements (Jesus first 'took bread') the paten and cup should be visibly raised. Regarding this, Professor James Cooper used to quote from the Paraphrase, 'Then in His hands the cup He raised.' A literal following of the Lord's example means the employment of both hands in this. In the Epiklesis or invocation of the Spirit one hand should touch the bread and the other the cup. It is to be hoped that, where (unfortunately) individual cups are in use, a large cup or cups will at least

be on the Holy Table. (The Directory prescribes large cups, and small ones are considered by many to be illegal.) The 'fraction,' or breaking of the bread, should be done in a fashion quite visible to all. The old tradition is that the celebrant receive first, and Dr R. S. Simpson wrote in his 'Worship, Witness and Work,' that 'it was an old Scottish habit that the minister should communicate standing.' When the elders return from the pews, bringing back the consecrated elements, the minister should stand while they are replaced on the Table and covered with the napkins or 'veils.'

In the Admission of First Communicants the same dignity and care should be observed as in any canonical service. The minister should robe as for a full service. Sometimes the laying on of hands is practised as in confirmation by a bishop.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

In the marriage ceremony there is a good deal of variety of method in details. The minister may meet the bridal party at the front door of the church and precede them up the aisle. When bridegroom and bride are to "take each other by the right hand," the minister may take their hands in his and place them together. He should receive the ring from the bridegroom or groomsman (preferably on Bible or service-book), and hold the ring up as he says, "In token, &c." He may add some verbal formula in the nature of blessing the ring, such as, "May this ring be the pledge of life-long love and fidelity." Then he should give it to the bridegroom to place on the bride's finger. In the declaration the minister should authoritatively raise his right hand aloft or place it on the hands of the man and woman; and in blessing them he should raise his hand or hands. He should precede the bridal party to the vestry, and thereafter down the aisle to the front door.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD

The minister (if he conveniently can) should precede the coffin from the house to the hearse, where he should stand with uncovered head until the hearse-doors are closed. At the churchyard or cemetery he should pre-

cede the coffin to the grave; and, in order to do this, should walk close behind the hearse from the house, or ride in the first carriage or car. (The undertaker who directs the seating should be told of the minister's wish to be well forward.) At the grave, if there are several ministers, all of them should stand together, even if only one be officiating. With regard to uncovering the head, if the weather be too cold or wet a skull-cap or Knox cap may be used. In the committal, during the words, "earth to earth, &c.," earth should be thrown upon the coffin rather by the minister than by the gravedigger. A point upon which authorities vary is the position of the minister at the grave. Dr Dearmer thinks it "most convenient" that the minister stand "at the foot of the grave." Dr R. S. Simpson thought that standing at the foot of the grave (or of the coffin, in the house) is the most reverent position—as though looking at the face of the deceased. Dr Dearmer remarks that anciently the clergy "stood at the side of the grave in no set order." Vavas seur, in '*Cérémonial selon le Rit Romain*,' says: "*Le prêtre se place aux pieds*." The present writer favours Dr Simpson's view. The Benediction should conclude the whole service, after the grave has been wholly or partially filled.

ORDINATION AND INDUCTION.

At ordinations and inductions of ministers it adds to dignity and impressiveness if all Presbyters wear robes and bands. The Clerk of Presbytery usually attends to the ordering of the service, but he may have so many other matters to arrange that it may be preferable for the Presbytery to appoint a competent director.

Finally, one may add that, while deportment in the sense of general bearing or manners, as the minister moves about his parish, is beyond the present scope, there is much to be said for Dr James Black's opinion that it should be made a subject of instruction at divinity colleges.

Many of the suggestions made above will appear obvious to experienced ministers, but they may be helpful to those who have received no instruction in these matters, and whom, as beginners, experience has not yet taught.

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