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A LOCAL RITUAL CONTROVERSY.

BY V. D. HARRIS, M.D., *President of the Society.*

Before leaving Milford to take up his residence elsewhere Major G. Cornwallis West handed over to our Hon. Secretary, presumably for the use of the Society, a packet of letters belonging to his grandmother, Mrs. Frederic West of Newlands Manor. At Mr. Ravenscroft's request I have gone through these letters with a view of finding out whether they contained any local information which might be of interest to the Society. I came to the conclusion that although now-a-days the somewhat acrimonious dispute, about which the letters are chiefly concerned, with regard to changes in Milford Church and its services might appear trivial, yet as a local illustration of the intense interest taken throughout the whole country at the time in what was known as the Ritual Controversy, it seemed to me that a short epitome of what took place in Milford might be of interest to the Society.

It may be said that the letters belonged to two distinct periods, nearly one third of them, dated 1873, had to do with Memorials in the Royal Garrison Church at Portsmouth to Admiral Sir Wm. Cornwallis and Earl De la Warr are of little local interest and I do not propose to deal with them. The remaining two thirds of the letters are all concerned, as I have mentioned above, with the changes it was proposed to introduce in the Church fabric and in the Church services in the years 1882—83.

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The changes were proposed by the recently appointed Vicar of the parish, Bishop McDougall, who was supported by some—not a large number of the—influential residents and were ardently opposed by a considerable section of the inhabitants headed by Mrs. West. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that considerable disturbance took place in Church circles in Milford. Indeed for some years Milford was split into two very hostile camps.

As the actors in the events are long since dead I think we may treat the episode from a purely historical point of view without giving the slightest cause of offence; and the so-called scandal has been long since forgotten.

In passing I should like to point out that the letters were for the most part addressed to Mrs. West, to which her replies are not of course available. I may say that this has been somewhat fortunate from an editor's point of view as, judging from some mss. in Mrs. West's handwriting, I should have had great difficulty in deciphering her letters.

The condition of Church affairs in Milford at the beginning of 1882 was something as follows. A new Vicar had been appointed to succeed the Rev. Henry Barnes Byrne, M.A., who had been appointed to the living of Milford in 1864. Mr. Byrne was the last Vicar appointed by Queen's College, Oxford, to Milford parish. The patronage of the living had been held by Queen's College from I believe the year 1639, but was exchanged I suppose during Mr. Byrne's incumbency with the Bishop of Winchester, so that the first presentation after his resignation was in the hands of the Bishop. I may say in passing that the vicars of Milford for more than two hundred years (1639—1881) had been, for some unexplained reason, natives of either Westmoreland or Cumberland.

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Mr Byrne had been Fellow and Dean of Queen's, and I believe Tutor. He was of a studious disposition, somewhat retiring, averse from change. He would probably have been described from a Church point of view as a Good Protestant. He was, as far as I can gather, everything that was kind and gentlemanly. He was a wealthy man and enlarged the vicarage. To succeed him the Bishop of Winchester (Dr. Harold Browne) presented Francis Thomas McDougall, D.C.L. (Hert. Coll. Oxon), who was and had been from the year 1873 Canon Residentiary of Winchester Cathedral and Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight. Dr. McDougall had been for about 14 years (1854--68) Bishop of Labuan (an island off the N.W. coast of Borneo). What he did in the interval between the years 1868 and 1873, when he was appointed Canon of Winchester, I am unable to say. He was a complete contrast to his predecessor, of great energy, autocratical and a bit ruthless in his methods, but cheery, hearty and personally much liked. I had not the pleasure of his acquaintance, and in this short summary I have had to depend upon what I have gathered from old inhabitants of Milford. Several of those present to-day knew Bishop McDougall and can correct my description if necessary. He was of quite a different School of Churchmanship from Mr. Byrne and was probably called a "Good Churchman" or perhaps even an "Advanced Churchman." Very early in his incumbency Bp. McDougall must have made up his mind to make drastic changes in the Church and its services.

It is perhaps only fair to state that what were considered drastic changes forty years ago would be considered mild now-a-days.

Of the Church feeling in Milford with respect to his proposed changes, what seemed to have been by far the largest section of the community was opposed to any changes whatsoever. This party was headed by Mrs. Frederic West who had no hesitation in condemning any innovation

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and gloried in calling herself a Protestant. She was supported by most of those who were called in those days "gentry" and also it would seem by the majority of Milfordians. A certain section, although not perhaps approving of all the changes proposed, were in favour of some change as they were dissatisfied in a mild way with the state of affairs during at any rate the latter part of Mr. Byrne's incumbency, when the services were very few and I am afraid dull. A third section was heartily with the new Vicar. As far as I can make out none were in favour of extreme ritual. I have gathered this information which is more or less correct not only by reading the letters to Mrs. West but also in conversation with old inhabitants, especially the late parish clerk, Mr. Jack Newman, who was always willing to discuss the matter.

It should be remembered however that the period was one of acute controversy about Church Ritual, and the air was electric. It was in the very year 1882 when the Bordesley Ritual Case occupied so much of the public attention. This case went on for two years or more from 1880 and the Vicar of Bordesley (Rev. R. W. Enraght) was first of all inhibited and afterwards arrested and imprisoned for Contempt of Court, he not having obeyed an inhibition to cease from practices which were pronounced illegal. I well remember the circumstances. The extreme party as represented by Mr. Enraght, however well-intentioned was absolutely lawless, and the intense fear of Romanism, which it is always in the mind of the majority of English people was increased thereby.

The preliminary skirmish between the Vicar and Mrs. West took place early in the year 1882 and was about the use of the Old Library for Parochial purposes. This was a small building near Mr. Keeping's New Garage I believe (I may be wrong). At one time it was used as a school. Mrs. West offered this room for the use of the parish, but under such conditions that the Vicar refused the offer on the

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ground that the conditions laid down by her were such as the Vicar could not accept. He said in his letter of refusal (Feb. 28th, /82) "I do not wish to use it for what you term 'Ritualistic or Secular purposes.' I am no ritualist and God forbid that I should be a secularist, but I wish to have the power of using the place in the evening in such a way as I think best for the moral and religious benefit of the people and, unless I as Vicar of the parish can be trusted to do so, I feel it would be unbecoming of me as such to accept the conditions imposed."

Nothing of importance happened after this until April. On the 11th Major Goodwin, who acted as Chief of the Staff to Mrs. West, wrote to her hoping that she would not give her sanction to any alterations being made in Milford Church. He called her attention to the fact that a Vestry Meeting had been called for the 13th April "for the purpose of electing Churchwardens and to take into consideration suggestions which will be made, with drawings illustrating the proposed alterations in the Church, with a view to obtaining the opinion of the Parishioners." The notice was dated the 8th April and was signed by the churchwardens W. T. Agar and James Oram. He further asked her to send a proxy for him to use on her behalf. This she did. The meeting was held but no votes were taken as only 11 people were present. The matter was postponed for a fortnight. Major Goodwin reported that the plan of the reredos it was proposed to erect was presented. It appeared to him to be a gaudy erection behind and above the Communion Table "with I am sure one large cross on it and I think two others." The alterations were estimated to cost £300 and the Vicar announced that a lady and gentleman of the congregation had promised to pay one half.

The next step in the controversy seemed to have been that Mrs. West wrote to various of the gentry in the neighbourhood asking for support in her opposition to the proposed alterations. Two or three answers are included among the correspondence. One from Col. Trevor Goff of Everton

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Grange, frankly says that the alterations were in accordance with his views and that he felt convinced that the Bishop had no intention of introducing into the services anything that was not strictly in accordance with the rubric. Nevertheless he deeply sympathized with those to whom the alterations were offensive. No one had a greater horror than himself of anything approaching extreme ritual. Mr. Cooper of Kiver-nells also wrote a very good letter much to the same effect. Next came correspondence in the local paper then called "The Lymington Observer & Chronicle." The first letter is dated April 15th (two days after the Vestry Meeting. I have not any idea who wrote it. It strikes me as rather trivial. Other letters were written in May to "The Hampshire Advertiser."

On April 26th the adjourned Vestry Meeting was held and Major Goodwin made on the day following (27th) the following report to Mrs. West:—

Dear Mrs. West,

It is all over with us, after a very large meeting and a great deal of speaking both ways, the Bishop McDougall refused to let the matter of the reredos and other alterations be put to the vote, saying that he and the Bishop of Winchester were alone concerned, and I understood him to say would carry the matter out had it been put to the vote. I feel confident we should have carried the day by many votes.....It seemed a mockery to have called us together to vote upon this burning subject and then deciding upon an adjournment, and finally informing us that we had no voice in the matter....Capt. Ellis, Mr. Hammersley and Capt. Fawcett all spoke against us and Capt. Peacocke, I regret to say, though he did not do us much harm did us no good. The only lady there had a veil down, she came in with the Bishop and I am confident was Mrs. T—, though having not seen her face I am not quite sure.

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After the somewhat high-handed proceeding of the Vicar at the Vestry Meeting it was only natural that feeling should become more bitter, and this was not diminished by letters which appeared as before mentioned in "The Hampshire Advertiser"—the Editor of the Lymington paper having refused to insert any more letters on the subject. "Some one must have got this paper under their thumb to save the Bishop," Major Goodwin remarks. On the Sunday following the Vestry Meeting, I think it was, Major Goodwin reports that at the morning service the Bishop preached a most pointed and insulting sermon, directed to and delivered at him towards whom he looked when thundering his most telling remarks. In spite of this however, when Major Goodwin asked him to call a School Managers' meeting to name another Treasurer in place of himself, he came down to him directly and wanted to shake hands. This Major Goodwin refused to do, and said he would neither shake hands with him nor speak to him except on official subjects and in official language. Both Mrs. West and others I think discontinued their subscriptions to the Church Funds and to the Schools, and Mrs. West applied for a pew at Lymington Church which, by the bye the churchwardens could not at the time let her have.

It may be interesting to mention what were the alterations to which so much exception was taken. I have gathered from reading the letters, which it would be tedious to give verbatim, that they may be summed up as follows:

(1) Removal of the plaster from inside the East Wall of the Church. This was apparently on the advice of the architect who considered that the East Wall was in danger and crumbling. This conclusion had been arrived at because there were cracks in the plaster. The view thus put forward was opposed by Mr. Springer the builder, who believed that the wall did not need repair. In the event it may be stated that Springer proved to be right as the

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wall, when the plaster was removed, was found quite sound and the cracks in the plaster only superficial. This work was opposed on the ground that it was an unnecessary waste of money.

(2) Removal of the ceiling of the Sacrarium. This was painted a deep blue as indicating the firmament, with gilt stars on it. Why this was objected to is not stated. As a matter of fact the yellow oak planking which was put in its place was by no means so decorative as that which it displaced. It is interesting to note that the decoration of the blue firmament and gilt stars is that which is much used in the modern R.C. churches on the continent.

(3) Removal of the Tables of the 10 Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Belief from the east wall and the erection of a Reredos in their places. Of course this alteration was that which was most offensive to the dissentients. The Reredos was especially a bugbear.

(4) Removal of the East Window, which Mr. Agar tells me had St. Andrew he believes depicted, and the substitution of another "painted" window.

(5) Removal of the grave stones which formed the floor of the chancel and sacrum, raising the floor of each about a foot and a half, and laying down encaustic tiles in place. This alteration, which was carried out, was described by Mrs. West as "routing up the graves and scattering the stone memorials of their occupants, the old forefathers of the village."

(6) Clearing out the Chancel and the erection of oak stalls for the Clergy and Choir.

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(7) Erection of a Vestry on the north side of the Church. This was not proceeded with. The opponents of the alterations suggested that 'such a vestry would be convenient for Confessions, the belfry vestry being too open for the purpose.'

With the exception of building a new vestry, the exact proposed position of which was not stated, all of the alterations were carried out in due course.

There is no trace amongst the correspondence of any public subscription list, so the amount required must have been subscribed privately. The cost was estimated in the first instance as £300, but this was exceeded no doubt. There were several gifts of individual subscribers, thus one gave the Reredos, another the new East window and another the encaustic tiles I believe and so forth.

Before giving up the contest re the alterations, Mrs. West made a final effort and petitioned the Bishop of Winchester on the subject. His reply was much to the point and was to the following effect :—

"I understand that Milford Church has been restored under a faculty from my Chancellor, son of Bishop Sumner and certainly not in favour of Romanism or Ritualism. I am sure he would not have given the legal sanction to any illegal ornament. Nothing that you have mentioned (?) appear to me to be illegal or even unusual. Unless they were so it would be obviously unprofitable for me to interfere. I have never found Bishop McDougall inclined to Romanism or even to extremes of Churchmanship."

Having been utterly defeated about the alterations in the fabric, the opponents made their next stand on what was certainly a side issue. It was stated upon very fair authority that the tomb stones which were removed from the floor of the chancel or sacrarium, or both, and the stone step

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upon which people had been accustomed to kneel at the Holy Communion had been carted away and used to line pigsties. This rumour gave rise to much excitement and no little scandal. Mrs. West at once wrote to the Bishop of Winchester about it and other letters followed. The Bishop promised to investigate the matter and later on sent a reply as follows :—

Farham Castle,
Surrey.

Dec. 7th, 1882.

Dear Madam,

I have enquired about the stones. I find that they were removed under the Faculty, that they belonged to the contractor, that they were therefore virtually disposed of by him, that they were not the steps on which communicants knelt in the chancel, but those into which iron standards had been fixed, wooden steps having been those on which they knelt. Mr. — says that he paid into the Restoration Fund the amount named by the architect as their value and declines to give any account of what he has done with them or to allow anyone to interfere with what he says is his property. I am afraid I can exercise no power in this. I trust the stones are not used as you describe.

I am, My dear Madam,

Your faithful servant,

WINTON.

With regard to the vexed question of these stones, Major Goodwin wrote to the Bishop in answer to a letter from him to Col. Jennins and himself, much in the same form as the one above quoted to Mrs. West, that the stones *were* those actually forming the step round the Communion table upon which Communicants had knelt and he added a statement from a workman (“a most respectable man”) as follows: “The stone removed from the chancel of Milford Church.....

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were the steps on which communicants knelt, there was of course between their knees and the steps, a cushion and also a board and some of the stones were those into which the iron standards were fixed to support the Communion rail, and both of these stones were used in forming the floor of pigsty”

Although at first it seems to have been said that tomb stones were similarly used, this contention appears to have been dropped. Bishop McDougall who was away at Winchester when the removal is stated to have taken place was greatly annoyed at the incident.

The third and last stand made by the opponents of the innovations was made on the occasion of the Christmas Day services in 1882. On the day after, viz. December 26th, Major Goodwin reported to Mrs. West that a Procession of clergy and choristers was formed which marched slowly up the Church from the Vestry singing a hymn. He added that the said Procession “only wanted Incense to make it that which was desired by our Roman Catholic Clergy, and I may also say our gradually Romanised congregation for they seem to me to like this sort of thing the more they have it.” He further wrote to the Bishop of Winchester to this effect :-

Milford Lodge,
26th Dec., 1882.

My Lord,

With much regret I have to trouble you by reporting that on Christmas Day, at the commencement of both morning and afternoon services in this Church, a procession was formed in the Belfry or Vestry consisting of Choristers in cassocks and surplices, the Curate, Rev. C. Stewart similarly robed, and the Vicar Rt. Rev. Bishop McDougall, and marched slowly two and two up the nave to the chancel singing a hymn the whole way.

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Feeling that this practice may be repeated on future occasions and not knowing whether it meets with your Lordship's approval, I beg to bring the matter to your notice and feel confident that you will give it such attention as it may deserve.

(Signed)

The Bishop of Winchester sent a reply the next day to this effect :-

Farnham Castle,

Major Goodwin.

Surrey.

Dec. 27th, 1882.

Dear Sir,

It has been held to be lawful for the Clergy and quire to proceed from the Vestry, or the entrance to the Church, up the Church to their places as is always done in Cathedral Churches.

There is nothing illegal to the best of my belief in their singing a hymn whilst they are thus in procession.

This also is frequently done in Cathedral Churches.

The custom has become very common now in parish churches, at least on special occasions.

Believing it to be legal I have never made objections to it, when I have found it in churches I have attended.

I have always considered it my duty as a Ruler of the Church not to curtail the liberty which the law of the Church and Realm concedes, believing that reasonable Elasticity is essential to religious life. I do not see therefore how I can find fault in the present case.

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This reply of the Bishop's appears to have caused the active opposition to the Vicar to end. The remainder of the letters chiefly consist of accounts of reprisals. These reprisals consisted chiefly in withholding subscriptions to various local objects, such as the Coal, Clothing, & Boot Clubs, The Organ & Choir Fund &c but most important of all to the Schools. Mrs West had built the Milford Schools, whether assisted by subscriptions from others or not I do not know, but she chiefly was concerned in building them and subscribed £20 a year towards their maintenance. This amount she increased to £40 a year when asked to do so. The loss of her subscription and of those of others must have placed the finances in a parlous condition, and Major Goodwin, who had been Treasurer of the Schools for 12 years and ought to have known, prophesied that within two years Milford would have to have a Board School! His prophecy however was not fulfilled. By some means or other the Managers were able to carry on and Milford has never had a Board School or its modern successor, a School provided by the County Council. No doubt contributions were received from those somewhat scornfully known to the old inhabitants as the "rich new-comers."

I have not troubled you with any extracts from the newspaper correspondence. The letters were not consecutive and did not give a history of the episode. They were long, rather elementary and, to my reading, dull and uninteresting. They were signed in the usual way "Protestant Churchman," "A Plain Christian," "Churchman," "Layman," and so forth. One or more were believed to have been written by the then Dean of Winchester (who was, so Major Goodwin said, a friend of Bishop McDougall), one or more were signed by "Ithuriel" and these which were perhaps the most uncompromising, I shrewdly suspect were by Mrs. West herself. Major Goodwin denied having written any.

I have omitted as far as possible names, except those of people long since dead. I have been obliged to bring in Major

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Goodwin's name constantly, for without his nicely written, clear and straightforward letters, I could have done nothing with the correspondence.

How long the Feud lasted I have no idea. At any rate Mrs. West's letter to Bishop McDougall, dated 19th February, 1883, did not shew much diminution of her annoyance. I suppose the Bishop had approached her about the Schools. She writes :

Sir,

Those who have transformed Milford Church into a sort of 3rd rate Belgravian boudoir, depriving the Church of its aspect of venerable antiquity—who have routed up the graves and scattered the stone memorials of the occupants, the old forefathers of the village—who have sacrilegiously converted the stone steps on which for centuries generations have knelt before the Altar of God, into pavements for piggeries—who have defaced the Eastern gable of the Church by an object approximating an inverted Railway wheelbarrow, in place of its ancient cross—who have substituted and preferred a service floral and choral to the rites of the Protestant Church of England to which I belong, and compelled me to seek its pure, spiritual and elevating Celebration in Lymington Church to my great (?) grievance and sorrow. Those, I say, like the rest of the world, must now pay for their whistle—take up the subscription I have withdrawn and try to do a little good after this (?) much havoc and build School Board—if it so pleases them at their leisure as I built the present school.....”

There are only a few more letters. From which it appears that Mrs. West and her friends refused entirely to contribute to a sum which was being raised as an Easter Offering for Mr. Stewart, the Curate in charge.