

Scottish Ecclesiastical Dress

It is rather an interesting fact that there are no rules laid down by law as to what dress a minister of the National Church should wear when officiating. The *Book of Common Order* and the *Westminster Directory* are still of some authority with regard to the conduct of divine service, but they are silent as to the dress of the officiant. It is different in England, where such dress is prescribed by law and rubric ; and it may be noted that while in that country there have been many disputes about such matters, we in Scotland have had little or no trouble. In England, ministers have been prosecuted, and in some cases have gone to prison because of their determination to wear garments which were judged illegal. In Scotland, any disputes on such matters have been of a local and temporary character. In 1575 the General Assembly issued regulations with regard to the apparel (evidently indoor as well as outdoor) of ministers and their wives ; but, with the possible exception that velvet should not be worn on gowns, no part of the old statute is now regarded as of any authority.

In 1773 the General Assembly decided that the Moderator should wear a gown when he was in the chair, and that the Clerks and the Procurator should have gowns provided for them. So far as the writer knows this is the last instance of Assembly legislation in the matter of ministerial dress. Whether the Moderator's gown was "frogged", as at present, cannot be definitely stated. The earliest example of such a gown appears to be that shown on the portrait of William Carstares, who was Moderator four times between 1705 and 1715. This type of gown was not, however, confined either to Moderators or ex-Moderators, as is the present custom.

The chief part of ecclesiastical dress in Scotland is the black gown, which is undoubtedly a medieval survival, although it appeared later than the mass vestments. According to the late Dr. Percy Dearmer "the gown has nothing to do with Geneva, and being a specially priestly gown is more sacerdotal than the surplice". We have an interesting reference to a priest's gown in a letter written by "Maister James Strachan", who was incumbent at Fettercairn at the date of the Reformation, and who did

not conform to it. He asks a friend to deliver to his brother "my blacke gowne, ye vestment, with ye ptnites (patens) and ye silver chalice". In 1559, before the Reformation had been officially recognised in Scotland, the Town Council of Ayr paid 45/- for "ane gowning" to Christopher Goodman, the first Reformed minister there; and the following year his successor received £1 16s od for the same purpose.

As early as 1562 the Puritans in England were protesting against the wearing of the gown, but there seem to have been no such scruples in Scotland. John Knox wore the black gown, as his portraits show; as did also his hero, John Calvin. Quite a number of references in documents of the period might be quoted to show that the wearing of the black gown by ministers was common in our northern land. In 1610 King James issued a Proclamation ordering all ministers to wear the gown when officiating, and though there were objections taken to the King's interference with the affairs of the Church, there appear to have been none regarding the thing ordered.

When Charles I., about a quarter of a century later, tried to introduce the surplice in Scotland, a petition was presented by the ministers against the project. This indicates quite clearly that his father's action had simply confirmed existing usage. It states that the "apparrell used in tyme of divine service . . . whilk has ever been used since the Reformation of religion" should be continued, as being most agreeable to the hearts and minds "of your Majestie's good subjects, as before".

At the funeral of King James in 1625, Archbishop Spottiswoode of St. Andrews refused to walk in the procession unless he had the same precedence as his opposite number, the Archbishop of Canterbury. After some hesitation this was allowed, but only on condition that he would wear his "whites", as the Anglican bishops did. The Scottish Primate then declared that he would go "attired according to the forme observed in his own country or not at all". As this was too much for the Anglicans Spottiswoode did not attend the funeral, and he was much commended by his fellow countrymen for the stand he took. Portraits of contemporary Scottish bishops, *e.g.*, Law of Orkney and Glasgow, Forbes of Aberdeen, and his kinsman Forbes of Edinburgh, all show that the "forme observed in his own country" was the black gown.

It was not, however, by the prelatie party only that the gown was worn. The Yester portrait of Alexander

Henderson, the leader of the Presbyterians, shows him with gown, ruff and cassock. That of John Bell, who presided at the opening of the General Assembly of 1638, shows him also with a black gown. The portrait of George Gillespie, which is still preserved in New College, Edinburgh, shows him in similar attire. Samuel Rutherford, as we know from other sources, also wore the gown.

In the bitter controversies between prelate and presbyter in the seventeenth century the gown came in for much attention. Dr. Sibbald, one of the "Aberdeen Doctors", wrote a defence of clerical dress, for which he came under considerable criticism by his opponents. John Forbes of Corse, the greatest of the "Doctors", maintained, in his massive work *Irenicum*, that it did not matter much whether a minister wore a surplice or a gown. In reply Gillespie argued vehemently against the surplice, but said that the gown distinguished the minister quite as well.

James Guthrie, the first minister to suffer death for his faith after the Restoration, wore his gown not only when officiating, but also on his way to and from Church. His opponent James Sharp, the Archbishop of St. Andrews, also wore it, as is seen in his portrait painted by Lely, when Sharp was still minister at Crail. William Guthrie of Fenwick, one of the best known of later covenanting ministers, is shown on an old wood-cut with gown and a ruff, similar to that on the portrait of Alexander Henderson.

During the Second Episcopacy the ministers in charges seem to have worn what were termed, by their opponents, "canonical" gowns; and the fact that they did so raised a prejudice in some circles against the wearing of gowns altogether. The bishops had endeavoured, with some success, to restore some of the older usages of the Scottish Church, which had been customary before what a contemporary writer called the "Donatism of the Covenant". The unfortunate thing was that in the eyes of many these older usages, such as the repetition of the Creed at Holy Baptism, the use of the Lord's Prayer in divine service, the singing of the Doxology at the end of the psalms, and the systematic reading of Holy Scripture, came to be regarded as things "prelatic", to be avoided and condemned by all right-thinking Presbyterians. While the opposition to the gown was perhaps not so wide-spread, nevertheless that opposition showed itself much more violently.

When news of the landing of William of Orange reached Scotland bands of Cameronians and other extremists took to

"rabbling" the curates, driving them out of their parishes. One of the ceremonies usually enacted on such occasions was the destruction of the obnoxious garment publicly. Sometimes a minister was compelled to don his gown, in order that his opponents might pull it off. This happened not only in south-west Scotland; some instances also occurred on the Borders, and in Fife and Perthshire. In his play, "Babell or the Assembly", Pitcairne, a somewhat scurrilous contemporary writer, speaks of the "contempt of a Cameronian minister for the gown". That "contempt" raised a prejudice against the gown which lasted for a long time. An anonymous writer of the early eighteenth century states that in his view the Presbyterian ministers would have much more influence among the people if they had kept up more of the old usages, and "worn something of an ecclesiastical habit". The earlier garb, however, was not laid aside entirely. At a meeting in 1696 the Synod of Dumfries (presided over, I may say, by my ancestor William McMillan, minister at Holywood, who had been an exile for his religion in covenanting times) passed the following resolution: "The Synod, considering it is a thing very decent and suitable, so it hath been the practice of ministers in the kirk formerly to wear black gowns in the pulpit and for ordinary to make use of bands, do therefore by this Act recommend it to all their brethren within their bounds to keep up that laudable custom, and to study gravity in their apparel and deportment in every manner of way". Nor were they alone in trying to keep up this "laudable custom". The portraits of some contemporaries, such as William Carstares, William Hamilton, John Law, David Williamson, and William Wisheart, who among them filled the Moderator's chair sixteen times between 1694 and 1730, show that they were all dressed according to the earlier form.

An interesting episode is recorded of Gilbert Rule (*circa* 1628-1701) minister of Old Greyfriars, the celebrated Presbyterian protagonist in post-Revolution days. Having been laid aside by illness for some time, on a Sunday morning he got up with the intention of preaching at his own church. His friends persuaded him not to do so, and asked him to preach to them in his own house. "Accordingly", says Wodrow, "he would have his gown laid about him and called for his Bible". He conducted a short service and, just as he finished, fell back and expired.

On the other hand we have the testimony of Dr. Calamy, who visited Scotland in 1709, that gowns were not worn

except by professors of Divinity or "persons remarkable for age or gravity". Evidently the practice varied in different parts of the country, for Patrick Walker, dealing with the state of religion about twenty years later, says that there were many "toom" (empty) pulpits in Scotland though the gowns were in them". This old covenanter knew that it took more than the dress to make a minister. Another piece of evidence from a very different quarter may be mentioned. In 1738 there was published a new edition of that grossly abusive book *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence Displayed*. It had a frontispiece showing a Scots minister conducting a service, clad in gown, bands and wig.

As the century progressed it seems that the wearing of the gown continued to increase. Reference is made in the *Scots Magazine*, May 1757, to the fact that the wearing of the gown had been revived by both ministers and precentors. (Readers of Scott may remember that in *Rob Roy* he introduces Mr. Hammergraw, the precentor of the Barony Church, clad in a Geneva gown.) Sixteen years later, in 1773, the General Assembly (as noted above) decided that its Moderator should wear a gown when in the chair, and that gowns should be provided for the Clerks and Procurator. The custom of ordinary members wearing gowns when attending church courts had passed away, never to return. The Moderators' portraits preserved in the Tolbooth Church buildings, Edinburgh, show that by far the greater number of the Moderators during the last two hundred years wore the gown. Dr. John Erskine, minister of Greyfriars, who led the Evangelicals in the General Assembly, did not wear one; although, as Sir Walter Scott notes this, we may perhaps take it that Dr. Erskine's practice was different from that of his colleagues in Edinburgh.

In country districts gowns were not so common. I have examined the wills of a number of ministers who lived in the first half of the eighteenth century, mostly in the south of Scotland. Although these wills were very full of details of property left, I did not see a single reference to a gown, but found a number of references to wigs. Two pictures by David Allan (1744-1796), "The Stool of Repentance" and "Scottish Catechising", show two ministers officiating in church without gowns.

Towards the end of the century things began to improve. "Daddy" Auld, minister at Mauchline (1742-1791), did not wear a gown, but his successor Archibald Reid (1792-

1803) did. James Wemyss, Burntisland (1779-1822), is said to have been the first minister of the National Church in Fife to revive the older custom. Certain of his parishioners objected to the garment as a "rag of popery", although it had been presented to him by the members of his congregation. John Wightman was minister at Kirkmahoe, Dumfriesshire, from 1797 to 1847. Shortly after his ordination he was presented with a gown, but on the first Sunday that he wore it a number of his flock left the church, headed by the precentor who declined to "sit under" a minister wearing a "Babylonish garment". In Dumfries itself a similar incident had taken place some years previously. John Lawson had been inducted to the Relief Church there in 1790 and shortly afterwards he got a gown. There was some trouble and his fellow-presbyters asked him to stop wearing it. This he refused to do and the case went to the Synod of the Relief Church (its supreme court). The Synod refused to condemn the wearing of the "cloak", but expressed regret that trouble should have arisen from a "very trifling circumstance". On the other hand when Thomas Thomson came to St. James' Place Relief Church, Edinburgh, the congregation paid "for gown for the minister, £5 10s 0d". The date was 1797.

During the nineteenth century the wearing of the gown became quite common; although in 1856 when James Cameron Lees (afterwards minister of St. Giles', Edinburgh) was ordained at Strathconnon, no gown was used either in his own church, or in several neighbouring parishes. In his history of United Presbyterian congregations Dr Small mentions that Dr. Gilfillan, minister of Viewfield U. P. Church, Stirling (1822-1869), did not wear a gown, which may imply that most of his colleagues in that denomination did so. At Sanquhar South U. P. Church the first minister to wear a gown was Matthew Dickie, ordained in 1879. This is the oldest dissenting congregation in south-west Scotland and dates from the days of the Erskines; later it was Anti-Burgher. In the Burgher congregation in the same place the gown did not appear until 1868, although Dr. Simpson, minister from 1820 to 1867, was a D.D. of Princeton University.

Apart from academic gowns, which one sometimes sees in the pulpit, there are three different types of gowns. The first type, seldom seen now in the Church of Scotland, is sometimes called "the bishop's gown". It has wide sleeves and is fastened at the wrist. The second is similar,

but its sleeves, which are full, are turned in and fastened at the elbows. This is probably the most popular form at the present day. The third has open sleeves, or perhaps we should say no sleeves at all, these being left in the form of a cape. It resembles more than the others the older "cloak" of Presbyterianism. The gown worn by Alexander Henderson approximates to this third form; while that shown on the portraits of Knox in Beza's *Icones*, the painting in the National Gallery, and that in Torphichen House much resembles that known as the bishop's. The gown worn by Moderators of the General Assembly is of the third type.

In his book *Worship and Offices of the Church of Scotland* Dr. Sprott says that the old "Geneva" gown is now best represented by what is called the preacher's gown in the Church of England (the date is *circa* 1880). Sprott adds that this identification is disputed by Harrison in his work on *Rubrics*. Professor James Cooper held that the Geneva gown was represented by the open-sleeved gown. In a letter sent to Dr. Sprott in 1882 he mentions that, as chaplain to Professor William Milligan who was Moderator in that year, he had recommended the latter to wear the "old Geneva (*sic*) with open sleeves and frogs. The English preacher's gown appears to me to be worse than anything except . . . recent inventions". A little later in the letter he makes it clear that he did not expect Dr. Sprott to agree with him.

The material from which gowns are made now-a-days is generally black ribbed silk. In earlier days, however, silk does not appear to have been much used, if at all. Adam Gibson, minister at Shapinshay, in the Orkney Islands (died 1678), had a "gown which was appreciated at £30", which would seem to indicate that it was made of silk or other costly material. Gibson's brother was Dean of Caithness. We know the price of the gown of another Scottish Dean, but it was much less costly than that of the Orkney minister. William Annand was Dean of Edinburgh from 1675 to 1689, and also chaplain to the Merchant Company. In 1686 he was presented by that body with "six ells of fine cloth for a gown at 20/- sterling the ell". Other gowns are mentioned which were made of "plaid" hand-woven woollen cloth, and also of canvas. The latter material was made of hemp, or at least had a certain amount of hempen fibre in it. It was not so coarse as present-day canvas, and was sometimes used for ordinary clothing. Roulin

in his work *Vestments and Vesture* mentions that, under the authority of an old regulation, canvas may still be used for the making of vestments in the Church of Rome.

It may be noted that on a number of the gowns of the later eighteenth century there was often a sort of cape, not altogether unlike that still to be seen on the cassocks of some priests of the Roman Catholic Church. This is very marked on the gown worn by Principal Robertson, in his portrait by Raeburn. There is preserved in St. Michael's Church, Dumfries, a fine wax cameo by Tassie, of Alexander Scott, ordained in 1780. It shows him wearing a gown of similar type. The General Assembly of 1575 forbade the placing of "all begaires of velvet in gown, hose or coat"; but perhaps the later ministers had never heard of the injunction. The capes mentioned seem to have been made of velvet, but in time these capes disappeared and the velvet became simply a facing for the gown. This can be seen on the gown of John Martin, ordained at Strathmiglo in 1793 and translated to Kirkcaldy in 1807. The facings were really "begaires", which are pieces of one cloth inserted in another of different quality. Velvet continued to adorn gowns until comparatively recent times. It was used as a sort of "yoke", an expression better known to their wives than to ministers. As the wearing of academic hoods became customary the use of velvet declined.

NOTE: In a future paper it is hoped to deal with other parts of ecclesiastical dress.

WILLIAM McMILLAN.