

# THE CHASUBLE:

ITS GENUINE FORM AND SIZE.

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N a late number of the "Irish Ecclesiastical Record," the organ of the College at Maynooth, I read an article on "The Gothic Chasuble," in which the writer advocates the use of the genuine Roman vestment, in which I entirely agree.

My attention had been drawn to the question as to the genuine form of the Roman vestment more than thirty years ago, when in 1852 I was engaged, with the late Father Rinolfi, in preaching a mission in the City of Galway. I was there shown an ancient chasuble, of rich cloth of gold, found in a chest in the muniment room of the (now) Protestant cathedral. It was supposed to have been left there in the time of James II., when Mass was last said in the ancient cathedral. It had been presented by the Protestant warden of Galway (he having no use for it) to the Catholic warden; for it was before the appointment of the first bishop of Galway. It is of the ample and genuine Roman form, such as we see figured in the copper-plate engravings in the large Roman Pontificals of the seventeenth century. It is the form which we see represented in the well-known

\* Reprinted from the "Irish Ecclesiastical Record."

portrait of St. Philip Neri, in the Chiesa Nuova in Rome, a copy of which may be seen in the London Oratory. A similar vestment is shown on the large silver figure of St. Ignatius, which adorns his altar, on great festivals, in the Church of the Gesù in Rome. I was allowed to take the pattern of the Galway vestment, and most of the chasubles used in our Church of St. Etheldreda, Ely-place, London, were made from that pattern.

The Galway vestment has the cross on the back; it is very probably, therefore, of French, not of Roman make; showing, as I shall prove later on, that this use prevailed then, as it does now, everywhere except in Rome and in Italy generally. However, I shall also show that anciently in Rome, as elsewhere, the cross was on the back of the chasuble.

The vestments, improperly called *Gothic*, were first introduced into England about fifty years ago, after designs made by that man of eminent genius, the late Augustus Welby Pugin, the father of the revival of mediæval architecture and of Christian art in England and in Ireland. It had always seemed to me, though I have an unbounded admiration of everything else that Pugin did, that this form of vestment was not a true return to that of the ancient mediæval chasuble. These modern Gothic vestments were, for the most part, cut into a pointed form behind and in front. They had not the ample folds of the ancient examples which we see figured in the old stained glass, and on the recumbent effigies of bishops and priests on monumental tombs and sepulchral brasses. These vestments, as there represented, come to a point in front. There is no evidence that they came to a point



FRENCH CHASUBLE, 1891.

behind, for we never see more than the front of the vestment on these ancient figures. But they fall in front into a point, naturally, because, being lifted up over the arms, and being made of rich but pliable silk or cloth of gold, they must necessarily assume this form, at least in front; for the ancient vestment being circular, that part in front that fell between the arms would fall in ample folds into a somewhat pointed outline. Of the way in which these vestments fell behind, I shall have something to say before I finish.

The modern Gothic vestments being cut into the shape of a point, or at least narrowed to an oval behind, and hanging flat, without folds, present only a poor, superficial imitation of the mediæval vestments of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries represented in paintings and sculpture. These so-called Gothic vestments, used in many churches in England, though rather tolerated than permitted by the ecclesiastical authorities, and forbidden by some bishops, are of all sizes and shapes, according to the fancy of the priest, or of some pious benefactress; or they are made according to some traditionary *Pugin pattern* of this or that convent of nuns, or secular vestment maker. This false departure has, as I believe, been the cause of stopping the restoration of the really majestic and authoritative chasuble of the Roman Pontifical.

The dimensions actually given by St. Charles Borromeo, the great restorer, under the authority of the Council of Trent, of ecclesiastical discipline, and of the solemnity of public worship, produce a much longer and more ample form of vestment than the modern Gothic. The measurements

given by St. Charles and other authorities on ritual prove this, as I shall proceed to show.

The Gothic vestments which were a movement, if mistaken in details, in the right direction, had to go through a period of serious opposition in England and in Belgium, where they had been introduced, as a part of the mediæval revival in which these countries led the way. We will speak first of what befel them in England.

Some of the English converts, of the *Oxford school*, having become Catholics, thought they could not be too *Roman*, and by Roman they meant anything and everything which they had seen in use in Rome. I remember an extreme instance of this in a great friend of mine, a typical Oxford convert, who died a universally venerated priest. He had recently been received into the Church, and I met him in Rome in 1854. He had taken the *Roman fever*. He was enchanted with everything he saw; and he saw everything *couleur de rose*, in the lovely halo of his fervid faith and religious imagination.

“How delightful [he said to me] is everything in Rome. I would have no Gothic churches. They remind me of the cold Anglican cathedrals, the burial-places of a dead faith. Here is the living Church, the real link for us, with the saints. I love the glow of colour and gilding; of thousands of candles, offerings of the faithful, which speak to me of the living faith of the people. It is all so unlike Protestant Christianity. Nay, I love to see the dogs running about free, in St. Peter’s, in and out between the legs of the Swiss Guards.\* It seems as if they too felt at home in their Father’s house.”

\* Since the Italian occupation, the dogs no longer frequent the churches. It would seem that they, too, have joined the party of the Quirinal.

“I should like,” he continued, “to see the dogs running in and out of our churches at home.” This was, of course, an extravagance, and in this sense it was spoken; but it indicates a very real undercurrent of sentiment which most of us converts can respect; for many of us have felt it, more or less; a reaction, on our conversion from Protestantism. When these English converts came home, many of them, very naturally, felt out of sympathy with the mediæval revival, in which, before, they had delighted, the animating idea of which was a return to the forms which we connected with the Catholicity of England before the Protestant *De-formation* of religion in the sixteenth century. That which offended these good people most, was the so-called Gothic vestment; and the very shape adopted in the pointed chasuble, gave a certain handle to their protest against *innovation*. An appeal to Rome was decided on, in order to endeavour to get the Sacred Congregation of Rites to prohibit the new form of vestment. It is said that some of the *ecclesiastical ladies* of the party—*Matriarche*, as such ladies are sometimes termed in Rome,—undertook to dress a doll, representing a priest vested in a Gothic chasuble; and, no doubt, without much violation of truth, it was made to look very like a lady dressed in a shawl or fashionable pointed mantle; and, by a happy accident, there had come in a fashion of making ladies’ mantles very like Gothic chasubles and dalmatics.

Whether the bearers of the doll had the courage to present it before the Sacred Congregation, I cannot say; but it was introduced into society at Rome, figured at “4 o’clock teas,” at

which some Monsignori dropped in; and this served to stir up gossip, and make the Gothic revival laughed at.

Some bishops in England, impressed by what some Roman Monsignore was reported to have said in the precincts of the Vatican, with the probability that something decided was about to be done by the Roman authorities, began to speak in condemnation of the Gothic vestments, if not to prohibit them.

Rome, however, moves slowly, and nothing was done by authority there until 1863, when the Pope having been informed that in the revival of mediæval taste, in which Belgium took a leading part, the mediæval vestment had been restored in some churches, Cardinal Patrizi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, by command of His Holiness Pope Pius IX., wrote a letter to the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines, Primate of Belgium, to the following effect:—

“Information has been received by the Holy See, that in certain dioceses of England, France, Germany, and Belgium, a change has been made in the form of the sacred vestment used in the celebration of Mass, and that this has been conformed to what is called the Gothic style.

“The Holy See is well aware that this style was in use in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, but that from the sixteenth century (the time of the Council of Trent), without any protest from the Holy See, their use has been given up. Wherefore, this discipline continuing, without consulting the Holy See, no innovation ought to be introduced.

“Yet, since the Sacred Congregation of Rites considers that there may be weight in the reasons that have led to this innovation, the Holy Father Pius IX. invites your





S. IGNATIUS.

*(Rubens.)*

Eminence to state the reasons which have led to this change in some churches of your diocese.”

The letter is dated, Rome, 21st August, 1863. From this letter (and nothing later has emanated from the Holy See, except references, in letters to certain bishops, to this letter of Cardinal Patrizi) it is clear:—

1st. That no *prohibition* has been issued against a return even to the largest form of the vestment in use previous to the Council of Trent.

2nd. That what is forbidden is to return to the ancient form, without permission from the Holy See, seeing that the other form being in possession, such a return would have the appearance of innovation.

3rd. That the change in the size and form of the vestment, in the sixteenth century, can only claim for itself *toleration* on the part of the Holy See, not authoritative sanction, the words of the letter being *Sede Apostolica minime reclamante*.

4th. That the Sacred Congregation admits that there may be *reasons of some weight*, “*rationes alicujus ponderis*,” in favour of a return to the usage of antiquity, and distinctly invites an inquiry. These reasons could only be, because the Sacred Congregation saw that the unauthorised clipping and cutting had gone on to an extent which the authorities might be disposed to remedy, and thus change the attitude of *Sede Apostolica minime reclamante*.

So far, as to the pre-Tridentine form of the chasuble; which may be seen figured in all mediæval paintings and sculpture, as well in Rome as elsewhere—notably in the Church of Sancta Maria del Populo, and in a recumbent

figure of an English bishop who died in Rome in the early part of the sixteenth century, which may be seen in the Church of St. Thomas of Canterbury of the English College, and which is evidently of Roman art of that date.

The ancient form of the chasuble was circular. It had an opening in the centre to admit the head, and it hung down in graceful folds, like a mantle, reaching almost to the feet. In fact, it was, as we shall see, no less a *vestis talaris* than the cassock. The ancient chasuble, in fact, differed from the cope, only in the latter being cut up the front, and being furnished with a cape, which originally could be drawn over the head, like the cowl of a monk. It was called *pluviale*, a garment that could defend the wearer from rain, and was used originally for outdoor processions, and so for processions generally, and for other solemn religious functions. If a modern cope were made ample and of light material, and sewn up the front, with the omission of the cape, and orphreys, it would become an ancient chasuble of the thirteenth century. It is this form of vestment that we see on the ancient figures, falling in graceful folds over the arms, and between them, in front, taking therefore a somewhat pointed outline. But the back part must have hung square like a cope; because the portion raised by the arms, and falling down between them when used in the sacred functions could not have been more than one-third of the whole vestment, and so the raising of the arms would only slightly disturb the portion hanging like a cope from the shoulders.

The Chasuble of St. Thomas of Canterbury preserved at Sens, and of which an engraving is

given in the Dictionnaire of M. Violet-le-Duc, is of this form.

The chasuble used in the Oriental Rites, such as we see celebrated in Rome, in the Church of S. Andrea della Valle, during the Octave of the Epiphany, is precisely of this ancient form, once used universally in the Western, as well as in the Eastern Church.

For these reasons it is an absurd misnomer to term this form of vestment *Gothic*, for it was in use ages before Gothic architecture (as it is also improperly called) had been invented by the marvellous genius of the mediæval architects.

The round form of the chasuble, coming down nearly to the feet all round, was what gave it the name of *Casula*, a *little house*. Durandus, Cardinal Bona, and other archæological and ritual authorities, say that it symbolized charity, which covers over all that is evil, and clothes the soul with the white garment of the Charity of Christ. This meaning is still retained in conferring the order of priesthood, when the bishop lets fall the folded chasuble over the newly-ordained priest, saying: "*Accipe vestem sacerdotalem per quam charitas significatur.*" However, the rite, as originally instituted, and placed in the *Pontifical*, must, when the ancient vestment was still in use, have much more fully expressed the symbolic meaning than it is expressed when the meagre modern chasuble, often stiff with buckram, scarcely wider than a monk's scapular, often not reaching to the knees, and covering nothing, is let to fall over the priest's shoulders. The meaning of the chasuble is still expressed in the words which we say, *Domine qui dixisti*, in putting on the vestment.

“O Lord, Who hast said, ‘My yoke is easy and My burden is light,’ grant that I may so bear this vestment that I may obtain Thy grace.” What we ask for is that sweet yoke of Christ’s charity, which makes all our priestly burdens light.

About the fourteenth century the material of the vestments had become of a richer and heavier kind of damask or cloth of gold, and they were often adorned with orphreys and borders of the most exquisite embroidery, heavy with gold, silver, pearls and precious stones. Hence they had often become so heavy that it was difficult to raise the arms from underneath their folds and to keep them extended in the form of the cross, as is prescribed, during the Holy Sacrifice. Hence came the necessity of the directions we find in the Missal, that the clerk who served, or the deacon at High Mass, should lift the border of the vestment, so as to aid the priest when he raised the Sacred Host at the Elevation. It was about this period that the chasuble began to be cut at the sides, so as to enable the priest more easily to raise his arms.

The Orientals and Russians, using the chasuble in its ancient form, raise it up entirely in front, so as to allow no portion to fall between the arms. This may be observed when those rites are seen in Rome. They also use a lighter silk, without any stiff or heavy lining, so that the vestments, lying in soft plaits on the arms, and being probably secured by some kind of fastening, are no impediment to the use of both hands in the ceremonies of the altar.

I have seen, in Paris, some Russian vestments, made of heavy damask or velvet, stiff with



ST. PHILIP NERI.

*(Statue in S. Peter's, Rome.)*

massive gold embroidery. These were cut out in the front, so as to resemble a cope, the material being left uncut over the breast, thus leaving the arms free for the ceremonies.

The Roman chasuble, and that used throughout the whole Latin rite, by the time of the Council of Trent, had gradually, by cutting at the sides, assumed the form of an oval, instead of the circular form of antiquity. Yet, it never innovated on the broad square form rounded off at the corners behind, which is still distinctive of the Roman vestment. It was also made of pliable silk, such as we see figured in the *Roman Pontificals* of the seventeenth century published according to the directions of the Council of Trent. It also hung, as we see in these prints, over the shoulders nearly to the bend of the arms.

In the *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* (tom. i., Lugduni, 1683), published by St. Charles Borromeo, for the vast diocese of Milan, which was intended to be, and has in fact been, the model for all dioceses, and which is therefore of the very highest weight, we read, distinctly laid down, the *measure* of the vestment of that period, therefore, in its less ample form as *tolerated by the Holy See—Sede Apostolica minime repugnante*, to which Cardinal Patrizi, in his letter above quoted, refers. This form of the vestment has therefore the prescription of three centuries, and to make vestments after this measure is plainly no innovation, but a dutiful following out of the prescriptions of the Holy See. This measurement has then the force of law, since in the *Ceremoniale* published by St. Charles, he was following out the order of the Council of Trent, and the work was published with the full Papal authorization.

It may be observed in passing, that St. Charles's directions are addressed to all the churches of his vast diocese following the Roman rite as well as to those churches which follow the rite of St. Ambrose.

The chasuble, as prescribed by St. Charles, is to be "three *cubits*, or somewhat more, in width,—*i.e.*, 60 inches in English measure, and is to fall from the shoulders at least one *palm*, so that it may hang over the arms, with one fold, at least, below each shoulder." It would seem, then, that it is to rest upon the arms, and thus make this fold *complicationem unius saltem palmae*. "Casula (quam alii phoenicium et planetam etiam ab *amplitudine* dicunt) cubitas tres et paulo amplius late pendens sit; ita ut ab humeris projecta, *complicationem unius saltem palmae*, infra utrumque humerum recipere possit."

Writing somewhat later (1763), Gavantus, speaking expressly of the Roman chasuble then in use, gives the measurement as about two cubits in breadth and three in length, *i.e.*, in English measure 40 inches in breadth and 60 inches or 5 feet in length. This is about the dimensions of the Galway vestment, and much longer and more ample than the so-called Gothic is ever made. In length, St. Charles prescribes the same measure in cubits or something more, so that *it may reach nearly to the heels*.\* In the measurement of the width of the chasuble, St. Charles is to be understood as giving the *minimum*, for he uses the word *saltem*, at least, and *paulo amplius*. As regards the length of the

\* Gavantus gives the exact measure of the Roman cubit at about 24 Italian inches (26 inches English). The *Roman palm* about a foot English.



chasuble, it is distinctly said that it is to "reach nearly to the heels," *paene ad tales pertingat*. This, of course, supposes that a priest should, properly speaking, and where possible, have a vestment in proportion to his height, just as the cassock, which is also a *vestis talaris*, should always be proportioned to the wearer. The words of the *Acta* are: "Longe autem cubitus totidem, aut aliquanto longius demissa sit, ita ut *paene ad tales pertingat*." It is added, that the *fascia* or *orphreys* forming the cross were to be, at least, eight inches wide. The exact words are; "Fasciam item unciis ad minimum octo quae assuta sit, ab anteriori et posteriori parte, usque ad extremum dependentem habeat; cui altera fascia transversalis ex summa prope parte, et a fronte et a tergo adjuncta, crucem utrumque exprimat."

Thus the *fascia* or *orphrey* is to come down to the bottom of the vestment, and there is to be another *fascia* placed transversely near the upper part, and these are to form a cross before and behind. It would, therefore, appear that the post-Tridentine chasuble described by St. Charles had a cross before and behind, exactly as it is described in the *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis. (Book iv., ch. 5.)

Gavantus says: "The chasuble had formerly a cross behind as well as before [he is speaking of the Roman usage]; but in more recent times the former has taken the shape of a pillar, which also has reference to the Passion of our Lord, as if the priest stood, as it were, between the Pillar of the Scourging and the Cross of Christ." (Gavant. *Thesaur. S. Rit.*, pars. 2, n. 5, p. 85, Lugdani, 1671.) The present Roman use, of the cross in front of the vestment only, is

modern, like the cutting and clipping of the vestment, and rests, apparently, on no authority beyond tolerated custom.

From this it is clear that the common way of accounting for the cross being on the front of Roman vestments—because in St. Peter's, when the Pope celebrates at the high altar beneath the dome, and also at ordinary High Mass in certain ancient churches, as at San Clemente of the Irish Dominicans, the celebrant stands behind the altar with his face to the people, showing the cross on his breast—has not a particle of foundation beyond pious imagination. Perhaps the pillar, originally, was a corruption of the cross in the form of the letter T, such as we see generally on vestments of the fourteenth century. It may have originated in the pious imagination of someone, and was one of the many liberties taken by vestment-makers in ancient as in modern times. Let us hear Cardinal Bona, on the subject of the liberties taken by vestment-makers. He says:—"The clipping of the vestments having begun, it went on gradually; but I do not find it to have been authorized by any Decree of Popes or Synods."\*

The clipping and shaping has gone on, depending on no ecclesiastical tradition or authority, in spite of the measurements prescribed as the *minimum* to which vestments could be reduced; solely on the authority of vestment-makers, or because of the poverty, bad taste, or penuriousness of the clergy or benefactors.

\* "Ex quo [the testimony of Moroni] et ex pictura supra relata facile conjici potest, quo tempore hujusmodi *scissio* fieri cœperet, et quomodo *sensim* propagata fuerit; *quam nullo Pontificum seu Synodorum Decreto stabilitam invenio.*" (*Rerum Liturgicarum*, lib. I, cap. cxxix., p. 284. Antwerp, 1690.)



FRENCH DEACON, 1891.

The dimensions of the vestments, however, in France, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and up to the Revolution, followed the measurements and directions given by St. Charles, or at least by Gavantus. (See *Le Parfait Ecclesiastique*, Paris, 1685.) The same appears from a French Ritual of 1715.

The Galway vestment is an example of a French vestment of the seventeenth century. The vestment attributed to Pius V., preserved at St. John Lateran's, and that said to have belonged to St. Charles, are precisely of the same shape and dimensions.

The chasuble preserved in Galway, of which I have spoken, is probably a French vestment of this period. It has the cross on the back, and I think some trace of a cross on the breast also, in the form of a T. The two Italian vestments I have mentioned, of the same period, have the cross on the front.

Who can describe the abortion of the chasuble that pervades France at the present day? Fiddle-shaped in front, not coming down to the knees, stiff with buckram, or paper pasted on the poverty-stricken half-cotton, half-silk material of Lyons manufacture. They are as stiff as tea-boards, and crack if they are bent.

I was told a story lately in Belgium, of a priest who objected to the stiff paper pasted between the flimsy silk and cheap cotton lining. The manufacturer—very likely a Jew, for the Jews are the great vendors of these shabby articles—misunderstanding the objection of the priest, replied: "Yes, M. l'Abbé, we always use paper, in order that they may wear better, and to add to the substantial appearance of our vestments ;

but I assure you, on this point I have a delicate conscience, and I never put into vestments anything but *des bons journaux Catholiques*." These Lyons vestments are going every day all over the world. They are cheap, and *les dames pieuses* can thus make their collections go a good way in providing vestments for *les missions étrangères*. We have plenty of experience at home of our own *dames pieuses*, who sometimes thus supply the necessities of *poor missions*, parishes, and convents. We need not wonder that Pius IX. intimated in the letter of Cardinal Patrizi, that there might be good reasons, *rationes alicujus ponderis*, in favour of a return to the more ancient form of the vestments; and at the same time to the strict requirements of the Sacred Congregation, that vestments shall be made *wholly of silk*, and not of spurious imitation-silk on the outer surface, but the greater part, cotton disguised as silk, fit only for smart cheap furniture and window curtains.

I think, therefore, I have proved my points:—

1st. That there is no such thing, and never was, as the *Gothic chasuble*.

2nd. That all through the Latin Church, the Roman vestment, together with the Roman Liturgy, had come down by tradition.

3rd. That the Roman chasuble came down to near the heels, and was wide behind, somewhat like a cope.

4th. That vestments cut to a point are pure inventions of vestment-makers, and are as great a departure from the ancient traditional form, as the vestment reaching hardly to the knees, behind, and in front, cut into the shape of a fiddle, of which France has the sole claim as inventor.

5th. That it would be, strictly speaking, no innovation to restore the Roman vestment to its ancient dimensions, though this would require Papal sanction ; but that it requires no special permission to make vestments of the size prescribed by St. Charles, and referred to in Cardinal Patrizi's letter, as the form of the post-Tridentine chasuble, which had become the established discipline of the Western or Latin rite, *Sede Apostolica minime repugnante*.

When once the traditionary form of the chasuble had been broken, and the question of convenience had come in, the way was open to any amount of private judgment. Having once begun to clip the vestments ; in a hot country like Italy, the lighter the vestment the better for the convenience of celebrant. In the East they kept to the traditionary form of the chasuble, and, as low Masses are not so numerous in the East, there was not the same motive as in the Latin Church for cutting the vestments for the sake of mere convenience.

The extreme vagaries of the French in cutting down the vestments after the 18th century may be ascribed partly to the fact that about that time the width of French silks was reduced considerably, so that the same number of yards would not make a vestment of the old form, and probably the same number of yards was used and the vestment was proportionately diminished. The spoliation of the Church by the Revolution made it necessary to make small means go as far as possible, and this may have led to the cutting and clipping of the vestments into the present distressing form of the French vestment. France is apt to set the fashion in dress to the rest of the

world, and so, French fashions in vestments followed much the same law ; moreover, as Italy is very apt to be influenced by French fashions, so French fashions in vestments penetrated and have produced the more modern Roman vestments, which are little different from French vestments ; except that the cross is on the front, instead of behind. The modern Roman Chasubles, like the French, instead of being three cubits in length, and coming down nearly to the heels, are only about two cubits long, scarcely reaching to the knees. If the authorities would give orders that in future one foot even should be added to the length, we should have a dignified form of vestment similar to the vestments of St. Pius V., and of St. Charles still preserved in Rome.

Rome has always preserved the traditional form of the cope and dalmatic. But the French have made as cruel a revolution in the form of dalmatics and copes as they have in the form of the chasuble. They have cut away the collar of the cope, at the back of the neck, probably in order to give accommodation to the immensely long hair coming down over the shoulders which the French Abbé is apt to cultivate. As regards the dalmatic, they have split it open at the sides, lined it with buckram as stiff as a board, and they have also split open the sleeves—lined them also with buckram, making them stand out like wings of cherubs of the 17th century. Possibly, thus fitted up with wings, the deacon and subdeacon seemed, to the pious imagination, visible representations of the angelic worshippers on high.