

SERMON I

INTRODUCTORY

Preached on the Sunday before Advent, Nov. 26, 1848

I CORINTHIANS I.2

*With all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours*

THE Sunday before Advent concludes the yearly services of the Church. It seems right on such a day to ask ourselves what use we have been making of them during the last twelve months. We who come day after day to offer up the prayers which our forefathers offered up generations ago, should especially examine ourselves on this point.—What have these prayers signified to us? Have they helped us to know ourselves better? Have they helped us to know our fellow-creatures better? Have they helped us to know God better?

I have another reason for speaking of these prayers to-day. In the Lecture this morning\* I was obliged to inquire into the characteristics of the Papal system, and to consider in what sense the word Apostate is applicable to it. Our Prayer Book, as you all know, has been called Popish. Lord Chatham, among others, gave it that title, opposing it, as you may remember, to our Calvinistic Articles. His saying has passed from one mouth to another; it has been eagerly quoted against us. Some Clergymen, it would seem, are quite ready to adopt it as their own.

So eminent a man must have had some reason for a sentence which he delivered very authoritatively. Those who have learnt the maxim from him must have felt that there are facts which justify it. The reason is obvious, the facts notorious. There are most conspicuous differences between the Liturgy and the Articles. Only a few of our prayers belong to the age of the Reformation: the Articles were the work of that age.

\* One of the Lectures on the foundation of Bishop Warburton.

The Prayers do not allude to any Romish tenet for the purpose of denouncing it: the Articles deal with all the peculiar portions of that system, distinctly and formally. There is nothing in the Prayer Book which reminds us of any controversies; the Articles could not have been written till all the questions which occupied the schools between the ninth and sixteenth centuries had been thoroughly discussed. Except the prayers for the Sovereign and the Royal Family our daily Service contains nothing which belongs to England more than to any other country in the world. The Articles have a markedly national character. In short, these formularies differ generically; the one appertaining to worship, the other to theological study; the one spiritual, the other intellectual; the one for teachers and people, the other specially for the teacher.

These contrasts must strike every one. It is on the last I would especially dwell. The Prayers, be they good or evil, are evidently meant for all, the Articles are meant for a class. Whether that class uses them well or ill may effect mightily the interests of all. But this we may say boldly: They cannot but use them ill, if they turn them to a purpose for which they were not intended. The student in every profession must have his text-books; but if he merely repeats the phraseology of his textbooks instead of bringing it to bear on the common business of life, he is a pedant and no workman; he has not really mastered his craft. His professional knowledge is only good so far as it enables him to serve people who are not professional, but who are just as much interested in the realities of life as he is. The jargon of a Physician does not make him better able to cure sicknesses; he has been studying medicine that he may not be entangled with this jargon, that he may find his way through the confusions which the equivocal use of words, or the elaboration of theories has brought into the investigation of facts. The Divine who will manfully turn our Articles to this account will, I believe, find them quite invaluable for the method into which they will guide him; for the deliverance from systems which they will enable him to work out for himself; for the tracks of thought which they will teach him to enter upon and to avoid. I do not think that their benefit to the student of theological facts

and principles can be easily overrated; I do not think it has yet been appreciated, or that it will be appreciated, till we make the same distinction here which is recognized in every other department of thought between that which is common, real, living, and that which is special, dogmatical, technical. There ought to be such a difference; if none such exists amongst us we are unfortunate: if it does exist, it may explain why Lord Chatham and others have perceived that our Articles and Prayer Book are documents of a widely different character.

But no such observation can explain why these Prayers should be popish while the Articles are formally directed against Popery. If that assertion is true, we are living in a lie, and have been living in one for three centuries. And it is the blackest of all lies. The moment we take for practising our falsehood is when we profess that we are coming into the presence of the Searcher of hearts, when we are about to worship the God of truth. Who can estimate what the state of a society would be which had been cherishing a falsehood of this kind in its inmost heart for three generations, a falsehood deliberately abetted by those who were called the messengers and witnesses of truth? What plagues and pestilences would not be needful for a body so rotten, what could be effectual?

If it be true, as grave persons—even Divines—are said recently to have affirmed, that the Reformers tempted the people of their day into our national Churches by giving them prayers which would not greatly offend their feelings—leavened as those feelings were by the superstitions to which for so long they had been addicted—no language can be found strong enough to denounce policy so worldly and so infamous. Men are to be beguiled into the service of God by being permitted to mock Him! And this mockery is to be perpetuated in forms which, as the compilers expected, would be used when the paltry excuse for it had disappeared. At all events the fraud now must be not more wicked than useless. What plea have we for perseverance in a course which we have so often been conjured by nonconformists to abandon and which would seem from this showing to have outgrown the miserable necessity which produced it?

This is a point upon which I must needs feel strongly, for I endeavoured to shew you this morning, that the malignity of the Romish system lies in this, that it has defiled and degraded *Worship*, denying man's direct access to his Creator, turning the service of the Living and Invisible Being into the service of that which is visible and earthly. Here was the great mark and token of Apostasy. If then it is just in our worship that we are popish, we are so in the most inward vital sense. We may protest as we please about other points; we have adopted into our hearts the essential poison of the system. All evil doctrines imply this principle, terminate in this result—they rest our approaches to the Eternal God upon a ground inconsistent with his revelation of himself, they make the worship of him false. Whatever else our Reformers conceded, here they were bound to make their stand. Here was that which affected the root of every man's life, that which concerned the whole community, that which robbed humanity of the privilege Christ had claimed for it by his death, resurrection, and ascension. There is no question about it; if we are wrong here we are wrong altogether. No dogmatic articles, let them be the best ever framed by man, will heal this wound; they may shew how deep it is, they cannot prevent it from leading to death.

Now precisely the claim I put forth on behalf of our Reformers is that they *did* make their stand at this point. My reverence for the Prayer Book rests precisely on this ground, that it asserts and embodies the principle of worship which the Romish system contradicts. If God permit, I will in some future discourses examine the different parts of our Service, that you may see whether they deserve this character or no. To-day I will speak of the Service as a whole, always keeping in mind the object with which I began, that of shewing how it bears upon our own hearts. I hope you will never hear from me any such phrases as our 'excellent or incomparable' Liturgy, or any of the compliments to our forefathers or ourselves which are wont to accompany these phrases. I do not think we are to praise the Liturgy, but to use it. If we find that it has been next to the Bible our greatest helper and teacher, we shall shrink with the modesty and piety of pupils from assuming towards it a tone of patronizing commendation.

When we do not want it for our life, we may begin to talk of it as a beautiful composition: thanks be to God it does not remind us of its own merits when it is bidding us draw nigh to Him.

I. I said this morning, that the main guilt of the Romish system, as it affects worship, is this—it throws us back upon a time when the Gospel of God's reconciliation had not been proclaimed, when the Covenant 'I will be to them a Father, and they shall be to me sons and daughters, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more,' had not been actually established. It invents ways of access to God, instead of telling us that we may all approach him with clean hearts as his adopted children. The virus of the system lies in this denial; take it away, announce the Gospel, tell men that their Baptism is a reality and not a fiction, and, as Luther constantly affirmed, the axe is laid to the root of the system; the different contrivances for recovering a lost state become inapplicable; the Priest must feel that he has another office than to invent such contrivances, or that his occupation is gone. I claim it as the first and noblest distinction of our Prayers, that they set out with assuming God to be a Father, and those that worship him to be his children. They are written from beginning to end upon this assumption; every other makes them monstrous and contradictory. It confronts you in the first words of the Service; it is so glaring that you almost overlook it; but the further you read the more earnestly you meditate, the more truly you pray, the more certain you are that it is not only on the surface, but reveals the nature of the soil below. That God is actually related to us in his Son, is the doctrine which is the life of the Prayer Book, and apart from which it becomes the idlest and profanest of all documents.

And there is no opportunity for special pleading about the word '*us*.' The compilers of these Prayers knew not who would frequent the Churches in which they were to be used. I do not believe they decoyed men into these Churches by unfair arts, but I do believe that they expected men of all kinds to be there—Pharisees and Publicans, decent people and conscious sinners—and that they provided a language for each and all of them. And this language was, 'Almighty and most merciful

*Father.*’ It was a very bold step to take. There was that in their own minds, and in the minds of all about them, which must have been revolted by it. But they did it. Not a vulgar calculation, which lowered them to a level beneath that of their ordinary lives, but a wisdom which carried them above themselves—above their own schemes, notions, and theories—led them to feel—‘We have a right to do this: we are honouring God and his covenant by doing it.’ But most of all this thought must have possessed them, ‘We are not *Reformers* unless we do it.—We cannot assert the truth of an accomplished salvation, of a perfect Mediator, unless we do it. We cannot put an end to the idolatry into which men have fallen, through ignorance that they can draw nigh to God as a reconciled Father, unless we do it. If there are to be Prayers at all, there is positively no course open but this. And if there are not to be Prayers, and Common Prayers, we are bearing no real practical protest against false worship. For it is not a practical protest to be talking against it, or ridiculing it; the one effectual process is to bring back the high and blessed truth which has been taken from us, and to incorporate that truth into the thoughts, feelings, and daily life of our countrymen.’

They were not disobedient to the heavenly intimation—they did not compile Prayers after the notions and forms of their own minds, or of their own time. They claimed, indeed, the gift of the Spirit; they had a right to speak, and could speak for themselves. But they delighted to believe that they could use a common language, that the men of their day were the children of God, as the men of other days had been, and therefore that they might take the words of other days with them, when they prayed with the same Spirit, through the same Lord, to the same Father. They would not let it be thought that just then, in consequence of what they had done, some new right or capacity had been acquired for mankind; they only asserted its privileges against those that denied them; aye, against the tendency to deny them which they found in themselves. Prayer to God gave them a property in the words of all holy men who had confessed Him.

II. This is the second characteristic of the Prayer Book

I would speak of. It is expressed in the words of my text,—‘With all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours.’

The Romanists asserted that the Church was bound together by the common adherence of its members to a visible Person and a visible Centre. How was this notion to be refuted? Can you overthrow it by calling the Bishop of Rome Antichrist? By denouncing the Church to which he belongs as the Babylonian Harlot? Or by setting up an Anglican system in opposition to this Roman system—by determining that the centre of our fellowship shall be at home instead of in Italy? Or is exclusiveness best defeated by Catholicity, cruel anathemas by an universal fellowship, a mimic Ecclesiastical centre, by turning to that invisible spiritual Centre which was made manifest when Christ rose from the dead and ascended on high? Our Reformers adopted the latter form of protest as the most reasonable, and they made it in this way. They found prayers which were based on this universal principle, many of which had been narrowed and debased by the local and idolatrous principle; they removed the outgrowths, they took the substance of the petitions. So they claimed for themselves and for us a fraternity with other ages and other countries, with men whose habits and opinions were most different from their own, with those very Romanists who were slandering and excommunicating them. They claimed fraternity with men who in every place were calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, whether they were tied and bound by the chains of an evil system, or had broken those bonds asunder. They claimed fellowship with men hereafter, who on any other grounds should repudiate their Church and establish some other communion—with men of every tongue and clime, and of every system. If they will not have a Common Prayer with us, we can make our prayers large enough to include them. Nay, to take in Jews, Turks, Infidels and Heretics, all whose nature Christ has borne. For he is theirs as well as ours. He has died for them as for us, he lives for them as for us. Our privilege and glory is to proclaim him in this character; we forfeit our own right in him when we fail to assert a right in him for all mankind. The baptized Church is

not set apart as a witness *for* exclusion, but against it. The denial of Christ as the root of all life and all society—this is the exclusive sectarian principle. And it is a principle so near to all of us, into which we are so ready at every moment to fall, that only prayer to our Heavenly Father through the one Mediator, can deliver us from it.

III. Once more. Romanism co-operates with the sensual tendencies of those whose minds are chiefly busy with the outward world—co-operates equally with the morbid self-conscious tendencies of those whose inclinations are towards abstraction and mysticism. No protest can be effectual for any moral purpose which does not counterwork its influence in both these directions. But how are Articles to counterwork it in either? What food do they offer to the craving of those who long for show and ceremonial, or to those who feel that there is an unseen and mysterious world near them into which they are meant to penetrate? ‘Take away these husks of words, give us symbols,’ is the cry of one, ‘Take away these husks, let us have some spiritual food,’ is the equally vehement cry of the other. Both have been heard in other days—they are raised with exceeding loudness in our own. You may denounce them, but you cannot stifle them. The Reformers knew they could not. But this they could do. They could treat men—not a few here and there with special tastes and tempers of mind—not easy men with plenty of leisure for self-contemplation—but the poorest no less than the richest, the busiest no less than the idlest, as spiritual beings, with spiritual necessities, with spiritual appetites, which God’s Spirit is ever seeking to awaken, and the gratification of which, instead of unfitting them for the common toil of life is precisely the preparation for it, precisely the means of enabling them to be clear, straightforward, manly; to fulfil their different callings in the belief that each one of them, be it grand or petty, sacred or secular in the vocabulary of men, is a holy calling in the sight of God. But to assert that man is a Spiritual being in this sense, you must claim for him a right and power to pray—you must give him a common prayer—*common prayer* in every sense of the word, not *special* prayers adapted to special temperaments and moods of character, but human;



not refined and artificial, but practical; reaching to the throne of God, meeting the daily lowly duties of man. If our spiritual people will have their spirituality to themselves, if they do not like to acknowledge that all men have spirits, if they think that they bring a set of spiritual feelings with them, when they should come to be quickened and renewed by God's Spirit, they must go empty away. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for *theirs* is the kingdom of Heaven.'

What Englishmen chiefly want is a clear recognition that the spiritual is also the practical—that it belongs not more to the temple than to the counting-house and the workshop. This the Reformers provided. They were not equally concerned to provide us with a satisfaction of that love of art and symbol, which, though genuine and human, is not characteristic of all nations in the same degree, of our own perhaps less than any. It was their duty however, I conceive, to testify, clearly and strongly, that the whole realm of nature and art belongs to the redeemed spirit, and that it must not abjure its inheritance. The old places of worship, the old forms of worship, had endeavoured to bear this witness. They had been turned into witnesses that man is a slave of the senses and of nature. From this horrible degradation it behoved the Reformers, at all risks, to raise their countrymen. But it was no vulgar expediency to believe and act upon the conviction, that they would not be raised out of it, or would be in the greatest danger of relapsing into it, if worship was wholly separated from sensible associations—if the Priest of Creation did not present the first fruits of nature, as well as himself, to the Lord of All. Quaker-worship has its own meaning and truth. Romanist-worship has its own meaning and truth. A sound national-worship should not be a compromise between them, but should justify the principle of each, and prevent them from leading, by opposite routes, to the same fatal issue.

It is not willingly, my brethren, that I have given these remarks an aspect of controversy. In the question which has recently drawn forth a comparison between the Articles and the Liturgy, I take exceedingly little interest. Which supplies the best test of heresy I do not know; for I have never looked upon either of them as designed for this purpose. If we use the

Articles to find out the errors of other men, and not to help us out of our own, I do not think we shall ever know what they mean, or in any real sense believe them. If we use the Prayer Book, not that we may worship God, but that we may lay snares for men, I am sure that it will prove our curse and damnation. I am greatly afraid of heresy, but I believe it is most prevalent amongst those who are ever on the search for it: who are continually denying some portion of truth in their eagerness to convict their brethren of denying some other portion of it. I claim the Prayer Book and Articles both, as the protection for those who repudiate the parties into which our Church is divided, from their common assaults. I claim them for the protection of these parties from the ferocity of each other. I claim them as a protection of the Truth from their distractions and mutilations. But most of all, dear brethren, I claim this Prayer Book as a witness against your sins and mine. As that, which, while we try to use it faithfully and simply, will lay bare to us falsehoods which have been hidden from ourselves, as that which will shew us how we may be set free from them, as that which God designs to be a mighty instrument, and which He will yet make a mighty instrument, of restoring real christian Godliness to a disputatious, hypocritical, Mammon-worshipping land.