

## SERMON XI

### CHURCH OF ENGLAND SIMPLICITY

"The simplicity that is in Christ."—2 Cor. xi. 3.

There is nothing in the whole Gospel more remarkable than the simplicity here mentioned. Every thing connected with our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is simple. Whether we look at His own character as contrasted either with the teachers under the law, with Mahomet or heathen law-givers—whether we look at the system which He introduced or the ritual by which it is accompanied—all is simplicity. Here is nothing unnecessary, nothing cumbrous, nothing to withdraw the attention from the one thing needful. I really think that it may be with safety asserted that one of the first things which strikes us in the whole Gospel scheme, and every thing connected with it, is its simplicity.

It needs no argument to prove that every part and portion of the Church ought to reflect the simplicity of its heavenly Master; and this, without doubt, was in the beginning the case of the Church of England. Its foundation rested upon the rock of ages. Its columns were reared by apostles. Its arches were framed by those who had learned wisdom from the Saviour's own lips. Its tracery was dyed in the blood of saints who had given their lives for a Master whom, with their own eyes, they had seen give up His life for them. The venerable temple of the Church of England reflected throughout the simplicity of the divine original. In it might throughout be recognised "the simplicity that is in Christ." This beautiful and simple structure of antiquity, however, was not long allowed to retain its original integrity. Goths there were, who by degrees presumed to daub it over with untempered mortar. Nor was it till the manifold corruptions of the Church of Rome were cleared away at the Reformation that any vestige of its original simplicity could be found. The reformers were the workmen whose hands, guided and strengthened by the unerring and never-failing spirit of God removed with unexampled care the accumulated rubbish; chiselled out with unceasing assiduity the foreign matter with which each bold outline was obscured, each deeply indented cavity filled up; and, whilst they religiously avoided the addition of any thing new, laboriously restored every thing old, as it had been at the beginning; restored the Church of England, corrupted as it was by Roman guile, "to the simplicity that is in Christ."

The doctrine of the Church of England, it may be first observed, was restored to "the simplicity that is in Christ." The written Word of Christ, without any admixture either of Apocrypha or Tradition, was adopted as the only test of doctrine. Whatsoever was not found therein, or could be proved thereby, was summarily rejected. This was at once fatal to all the cumbrous additions with which the superstition of Rome had loaded it.

Transubstantiation, human merit, the intercession of the Virgin Mary, angels and saints, the seven sacraments, and a host of other fabrications, the mere doctrines of men—so entirely, however, received as the doctrines of Christ that the opening eyes of the first reformers were quite astonished to find no vestige even of a foundation for them in the Word of Christ—speedily passed away. Human nature universally corrupt and wholly unable to help itself—Christ the only redeemer, mediator, and intercessor—His sacrifice once offered "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world"—faith working by love, the only condition required for rendering this sacrifice personally efficacious—the Holy Spirit, the only source of satisfaction, and His influence to

be sought for generally in the only two sacraments, Baptism and the Supper of our Lord, as well as in prayer and all other appointed means of grace—such was the simplicity to which the doctrine of the Church of England was restored. It was "the simplicity that was in Christ." For of all the cumbrous and heterogeneous mass of doctrine, with which the Church of England had been gradually overloaded from Rome, there was none which endured the test of Christ's Word but these.

Next, it may be observed that the ritual of the Church of England was restored to "the simplicity that is in Christ." Roman superstition had loaded it with almost worse than heathen mummary. Let a stranger even now pay a visit to the Pantheon at Rome between the hours of ten and twelve. He will still behold the walls of that once most majestic of all heathen temples so adorned with statues, its area so covered with altars, its avenues so thronged with pompous trains of sacrificing priests in gorgeous attire and with censers in their hands, their prayers still poured forth in the very same language as were those of old in the same place to Jupiter and Juno and all the other countless divinities of ancient pagan Rome, that he will not without reason be inclined to doubt the truth of the temple having passed from the hands of heathens to those of professedly Christian masters. Such was the ritual with which the Church of England was disfigured. But our reformers of blessed memory restored this likewise to "the simplicity that is in Christ." A simple service of prayer, simply prayed and in the native tongue—a portion of God's Word audibly read and familiarly explained—the praises of God simply sung—two sacraments administered with no greater ceremonial than is necessary for the administering of them decently and in order: such is the sum and substance of the ritual of the Reformed Church of England as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer—a book which none who read it carefully and use it constantly can fail of finding wholly conceived in "the simplicity that is in Christ."

Thirdly, it may be observed that the ministry of the Church of England was restored to the same simplicity. The office of all heathen ministries is to offer sacrifices for the people. The office of the Jewish high priest was by God's appointment the same. "The simplicity that is in Christ" demanded that there should be but one priest—namely, Himself; and that the office of the ministry which He appointed should consist, not as amongst the Heathen and the Jews in offering sacrifices, but in preaching His Word, and guiding lost sinners to Him. This simple ministry in the Church of England had, by Roman agency, been changed into a sacrificing priesthood, of a most exclusive and intolerant character. At the Reformation it was restored to "the simplicity that is in Christ." The only pity is that the word priest was ever adopted in the Book of Common Prayer. For though used by our reformers as an abbreviation of the word *presbyter*, or *elder*, and exactly in the same sense, and not at all in the Heathen or Jewish signification of a sacrificer, the confusion of terms has, without doubt, led to a great confusion of ideas, and laid the foundation for a superstructure much to be deplored. Let the ministers of the Reformed Church of England only divest themselves of all idea of priesthood, in the ordinary sense of the term, as was clearly intended in the Book of Common Prayer. Let them go forth as presbyters, or elders, amongst their brethren, specially set apart by God's Holy Spirit from secular callings, and ordained to a spiritual ministry, such as is committed to them by the terms of the ordination service; and they will as entirely as it is possible for flesh and blood to do, represent "the simplicity that is in Christ."

Such was the work of our reformers. But I will not conceal that at this present time, with reference to the Church of England, I can use no other language than that used by St. Paul, immediately before the text—"I am jealous over you with god jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin. But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." The simplicity of the Church of England, of her doctrine, her ritual, her ministry, the simplicity restored at the Reformation, is again in danger. The serpent, who beguiled Eve through his subtilty, has even now instruments hard at work, endeavouring to corrupt your minds. I have already shown the various ways in which Tractarianism is busy in undermining the simplicity of the doctrine, ritual, and ministry of the Church. There is no occasion for me again to enumerate these ways. But one warning, even at the risk of wearying you outright, I will again and again repeat. It is, that as subtilty was the weapon so successfully wielded by the tempter of olden time, so now likewise subtilty is the weapon with which the simplicity of the Church of England is assailed. The danger from an open enemy and an open attack can be estimated with some precision, and prepared for accordingly. But the lurking assailant, and the blow aimed from behind one's back by a pretended friend, against this, even if ever so much on our guard, we can scarcely feel safe.

Depend upon it, my friends, "even our enemies themselves being judges," the Church of England is not only in England itself, but throughout the world, the strongest existing human bulwark in defence of the truth. It is a light to which conflicting sects, though they are not always, perhaps, ready to acknowledge the obligation, owe nevertheless their not having long since foundered in the treacherous waters on which they float. Once let this bulwark be undermined—once let this light be dimmed—and the existence of truth will be in the utmost peril, if not altogether desperate. Against the corruptions of Popery in particular there is no bulwark so strong as this. Acts of Parliament are as nothing to it. Let the Church of England in her doctrine, in her ritual, in her ministry, retain "the simplicity that is in Christ," and we may dare the Church of Rome to do her worst. It is impossible, therefore, to be too jealous over this. It is impossible to watch too narrowly, or resist too perseveringly, every attack, or even encroachment. As long as this simplicity is upheld within I have little, if any, fear of the result of attacks from without. But once let the Christian simplicity of Church of England doctrine be from time to time more and more tainted with Romish fables—that of her ritual gilded with Romish pageantry and show—that of her ministry changed into Romish assumption of priestly power, and Rome will hardly be able to open her arms wide enough to embrace the multitudes of victims who, thus gradually prepared, will without the least show of resistance sink into her bosom. No less than five clergymen and twelve laymen connected with a single church,\* in which this sort of subtle assault upon Church of England simplicity has been for some time past carried on, have, during the last week, openly seceded to the Church of Rome. This is but the first fruits. God only knows how large will be the harvest which must in the end be gathered in, if he who beguiled Eve through his subtilty be permitted, which God forbid, to sow the same sort of seed generally amongst us!

In all His personal intercourse with His people, simple as a child though invested with all the omnipotence of Jehovah, our blessed Lord, as on Friday next, went forth to Calvary to seal with His blood the simplicity of His testimony. With the same guileless simplicity may His Church in this country ever continue to follow in the blessed footsteps of her heavenly

Master! Doctrine and ritual, so thoroughly reflecting the simplicity that is in Christ as those restored at the Reformation of the Church of England, form a sure road by which contrite sinners may find rest in the bosom of Jesus Christ.

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*Deane, Sunday next before Easter, 1851.*