

SERMON VIII

INTONING.

"I will pray with the understanding."—1 Cor. xiv. 15.

IN the first instance, Tractarianism was established and promulgated through the pulpit and press. Sermons and tracts, then biography and popular stories, were the chief channels through which Romish corruptions flowed into the bosom of the Church of England. It is matter of history that there is no Church which so completely possesses the power of adapting itself to times and circumstances as the Roman Church. Faithful to the example which they have always before their eyes, the Tractarians likewise are very ready in changing the mode of proceeding, according as events seem to render it advisable. At the present time, for instance, when men's attention is particularly alive to anything new and startling in the way of doctrine, not so much the pulpit or the press, not sermons or tracts, but that which captivates the eye, which harmonizes with the increasing luxuriousness of the age, which leads men on insensibly step by step to ends which, if set before them in the first instance in naked words, would at once alarm ; pomp, pageantry, and ceremonial are, for the most part, the roads on which the unwary are beguiled Romewards. I am not by any means at once and of necessity satisfied because I am assured that in certain churches, and by certain persons, nothing but the Gospel is preached. In those places and by those persons is the whole Gospel ever preached at all? It may be that nothing but the Gospel is preached; but is it equally true that nothing but the Gospel is insensibly instilled in the novel form and ceremonial of the service? Romish forms, ceremonies, and customs, grafted on the simple ritual of the Church of England, are as formidable instrumentalities for the propagation of error as even the pulpit or press themselves. They are in truth almost more formidable, because they are less startling, more concealed, more insinuating and winning. It is my intention, then, to-day to speak to you respecting the novelties introduced by the Tractarians into our Church services, and in the first place and especially respecting the intoning of the prayers.

"I will pray with the understanding," is the language of the apostle in the text. In these few words we have a striking description of what a religious service ought to be. Not form, not ceremony, not splendour and pageant, not processions of candles and crucifixes, choristers and priests, not prostrations, and ablutions, and bowings, and turnings to every point of the compass in succession—not any of these things, but prayer. I do not mean to run counter to the apostolic injunction, 1 Cor. xiv. 40—"Let all things be done Recently and in order." The same apostle who wrote the words of my text wrote these words likewise. The two precepts are strictly in unison with each other. In the service of God, just such an amount of form and ceremonial as is necessary to the performance of that service with decency and order is without doubt required. But whatever is more than this—whatever amounts to so much as makes it evident that not prayer but ceremonial is the essence, and the indispensable and most highly valued portion of the service—that is altogether contrary to the spirit and meaning of St. Paul. According to his view, prayer is unquestionably the essence of the service: all else is comparatively of small importance. Prayer is the essence of religious service—prayer made with the understanding—prayer into which intellect enters; not a mere form of words—an effort of the lips: not a vain repetition of unintelligible sentences, but words such as the understanding employs to express the desires of the heart. It is just such a service as this—the prayer of the understanding—put up decently and in order, that is furnished in the beautiful and simple liturgy of the Church of England.

Compare with the scriptural model of the text almost any part of the Roman service. What is it which first attracts the attention on entering a Roman place of worship? Anything but the prayers. The splendour of the altar, the vestments of the priests, the processions and prostrations, the music—in short, anything but the prayers. These evidently form the least essential part of the

service. And what prayers there are, are they such as that it could be said of them, "I will pray with the understanding?" Always offered up in one and the same, and that no longer a living, language, in England, in Ireland, in France, Russia, Spain, Portugal, Austria, and Italy—amongst the miners of Mexico on the one side, and of Australia and New Zealand on the other—still the same unvarying Latin service prevails, understood by none except the more educated classes, and by few even of them except the officiating priests. The priests may possibly pray with the understanding—few of the rest of the congregation by any means can: to them at least the ceremonial is every thing. The ears, the eyes, but not the "understanding," are enlisted in the service of God. 1 Cor. xiv. 11:—"Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian; and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me."

As nearly as, under the circumstances, is possible, after the Roman model, is the favourite service of the Tractarians. The object is to make the service as little as possible one of the understanding, and so exalt the office and importance of the priest. The Latin tongue, however much desired, is of course inadmissible. The old custom of cathedrals, therefore—well suited enough, perhaps, though even of this a doubt may be reasonably entertained, for a few large churches widely scattered, almost invariably in towns in which there is likewise a large number of parish churches—is for this purpose transferred to even the smallest village congregations. However much a refined and practised ear may enable the understanding to keep up with the service of our cathedral churches, as it is intoned by the most skilful musicians whom money can command, it is possible that the rude unlettered masses—is it likely that any except a very few of even the more educated classes—can really feel a prayer intoned to be a prayer of the understanding, especially intoned as, when the attempt is made by the inexperienced, it is with every circumstance calculated to render it harsh or even ridiculous? To a mixed congregation, what better is a service intoned than a service in the Latin tongue? What must be the inevitable result of such a process? The understanding being unemployed, the heart will gradually lose its interest. Either entire indifference will succeed, or the disposition, so congenial with natural indolence, to put trust in the intercessions of others rather than in Christ's blessing on our own exertions. The priest will rapidly become all important in the estimation of the worshippers, who will easily accustom themselves to be prayed for rather than to pray. All this leads rapidly Romewards. But, even if it did not, it is at least the setting up in the bosom of the Church of England some of Rome's worst corruptions. It is the stifling the voice, the "understanding" of prayer. It is the changing a living into a dead service. It is making, in the most important of all things, reasonable men into mere machines. It is encouraging spiritual indolence and misplaced reliance upon those who cannot help. It is acting in direct defiance, if not of the letter, at least, as has been shown already, of the spirit of God's Word, and of the spirit and common practice even of the Church of England itself, for whose rules the Tractarians affect such great respect. To the intoning of the prayers there is added, by the same parties, a great deal of ceremonial, all tending—to the same end—the exaltation of the priest, and the mystification of the congregation. These are, indeed, the means by which the minister, who is in truth the servant of the flock, 2 Cor. iv. 5, comes most improperly to be regarded as a priest making intercession for, instead of with, the people. And so the office of the one only great High Priest is intruded into by those whose proper station is that of stewards of His mysteries. We hear in some churches of processions of clergymen and choristers. In others, these are preceded by the cross-bearer and the cross. At one part of the service the clergyman is seen praying with his back purposely turned upon the people. At others he is crossing himself and making prostrations to the east. Garlands of flowers adorn the altar, as it is called, on some occasions. On others, the crimson covering is changed for purple or black. Will it be credited that in some churches, even in the nineteenth century, candles are lighted upon the altar at mid-day, and the practice gravely justified by educated men? One must see in order to believe how amongst those who still call themselves members of the Church of England there are some who vie with each other in introducing the most puerile mummeries of Rome. The eternal city itself, in the midst of the holy week, can scarcely furnish a larger amount of childish

nonsense than may be at this moment met with any day in some of the Protestant churches of London. Pity that such innovations should ever have been permitted to reach their present height! Pity that the law, if at present too weak, should not be at once so strengthened as to vindicate the apostolical simplicity of the ritual of the Church of England!

I protest then, brethren, most earnestly and most entirely against the whole system, which has been exposed to you to-day. I protest against it as unscriptural—as opposed to the spirit and practice of the Church of England—as a means of introducing many Romish abuses, both of doctrine and practice, and as a road which leads directly towards Rome itself. I desire, brethren, to place you most thoroughly upon your guard against the danger which lurks beneath these most specious practices. You will hear them justified as a revival of that which is ancient and at the same time most gratifying both to the eye and the ear. You will hear them excused as impossible to occasion any harm. You will be asked what there is objectionable in a few ritual changes, so that no unsound doctrine is preached. You may yourselves even be almost disposed to feel that you are running no risk by resorting to such things. Do not be deceived. The influence of such a system, believe me, is in reality much greater than you are apt to imagine. Day by day you will be insensibly led on, till you at length find yourselves unawares at a point at the most distant prospect of which you would, in the first instance, have shuddered. I speak not now of the number, large though it be, of those in whose case such innovations as these have been the gate which has opened upon Rome itself. I speak rather of those who still remain by profession members of the Church of England, though, through habituation to such practices, they have lost its spirit. I speak of those who, from having once experienced the privilege and blessing of praying with the understanding, have since been changed into mere machines; who instead of, as in times past, themselves coming boldly to the throne of grace that they may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need, Hebrews iv. 16, have been gradually led to acquiesce in the propriety of sitting still themselves, and leaving all the wrestling in prayer to be done for them, if done at all, by others. Depend upon it, the work of Tractarianism and of Rome, though perhaps more slowly, is nevertheless more surely and more effectually done by ritual than either by the pulpit or the press. Do I want to deprive a man of all faith in Jesus? Do I want to make him a self-righteous formalist? Do I want so to prepare him as that he may be ready to be delivered over, bound hand and foot, to Rome? I do not care if he never hears a sermon. I do not care if he never reads a tract. Let me but have him as a regular attendant in a church in which the service is intoned, and accompanied by some such ceremonies as those noted above, I shall need nothing more. I shall have gained my end.

Deane, Third Sunday in Lent, 1851.