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S E R M O N

Preached before the

K I N G

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W H I T E - H A L L,

Decemb. the 24th. 1676.

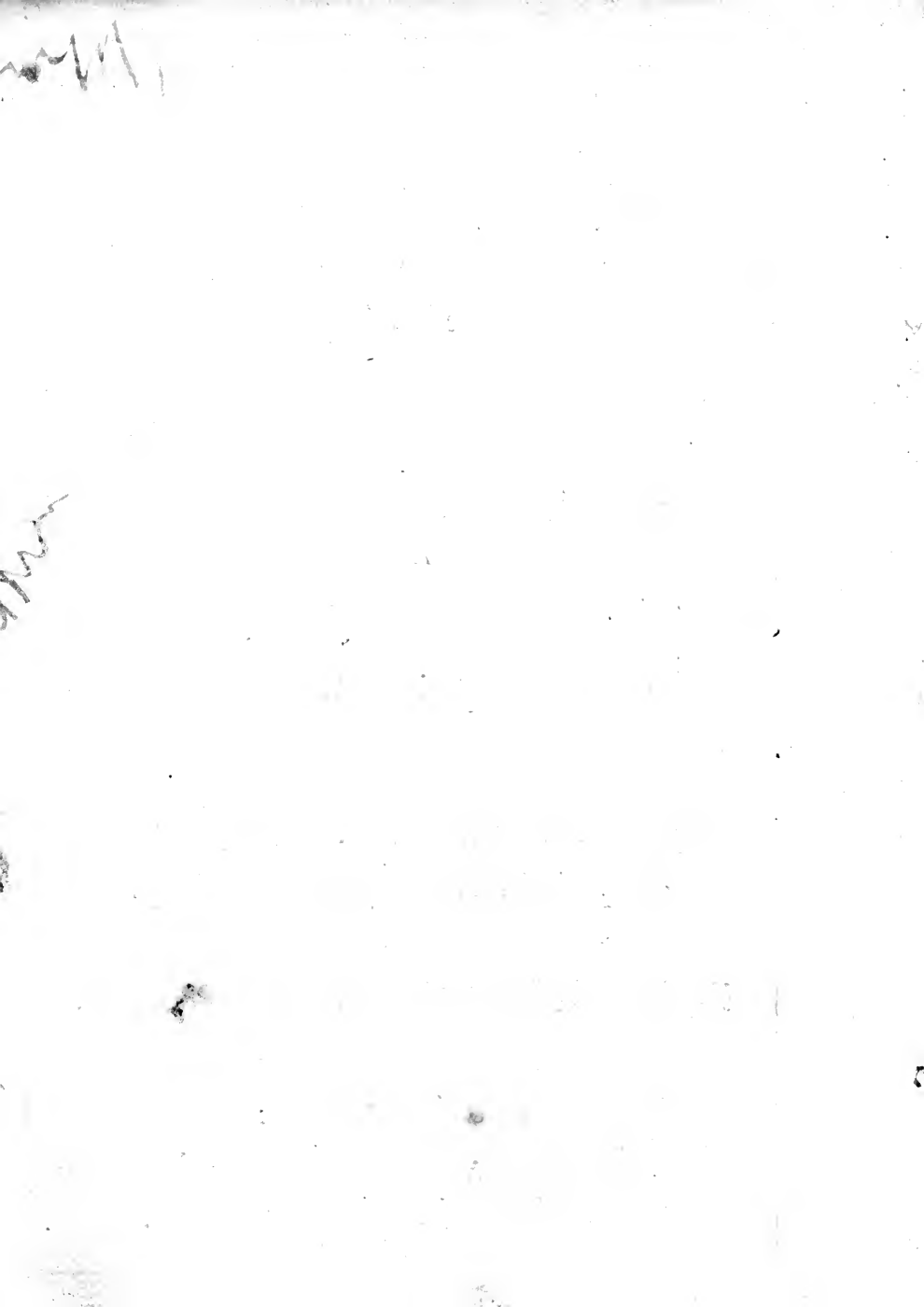
By T H O M A S S P R A T, D. D.

Chaplain in Ordinary to his Majesty.

Published by his Majesties Special Command.

L O N D O N:

Printed for *Henry Brome*, at the Gun
at the West end of *St. Pauls*. 1677.



A
SERMON

Preached before the

KING

AT

WHITE-HALL.

St. MARK, X. ver. 15.

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.



Hese are the words of our Blessed Saviour, on occasion of his Disciples forbidding little Children to be brought to him: which it may be supposed, they did in zeal for the reputation

of their Master ; believing it to be far below the dignity of so great, and wise a Teacher , to spend time in instructing of Children ; whilst his chief adversaries the Pharisees appear'd in their Synagogues, and most public Assemblies , and there, with much pompous ostentation of profound Wisdom , taught their men, those that thought themselves , in that Nation, their wisest men.

But Christ himself understood better the interest , and power of his own Religion. He knew, that the design of his coming into the world, was, not to continue that Pharisical, falsely-grave formality of life, and worship , which was then in use ; but to introduce a rational , moral , spiritual Doctrine, and a plain, unaffected, saving way of teaching it. He knew , that his Doctrine so taught was able to convert the most specious, worldly wisdom ; or to confound it, if it would not be converted.

And therefore he took a course quite contrary to the Pharisees practice, and to his own Disciples expectations. He taught in the meekest manner, and refus'd not the meanest Scholars . *He resisted the proud, but*

but he gave grace to the humble. The Scribes, and Pharisees he often sharply contradicted, the multitude he always mildly instructed: By his different behaviour to the one, and the other, he gave evident proof, that all false pretences, and affectations of knowledge are more odious to God, and deserve to be so to men, than any want, or defect of knowledge can be.

In prosecution of this most plain, and familiar way of teaching, whereas his Disciples here would have rejected little children, he rebuked them, he took the children in his arms, he blessed them; for the innocence of their age, he gave it many testimonies of his extraordinary favour. Ver. 13, 14.

The first benefit he did to mankind in this world, was his becoming a child: The first sign he shewed of his own Divine Wisdom, was his disputing with the Jewish Doctors, in the age of a child: The first example he gave of obedience, and that even to the Jewish Law, was his being circumcised, when a child. And here also, when he would prescribe a pattern of Evangelical purity, and humility, he declares, that little children, and those men who

most resemble their nature, are not only capable, but most capable of his heavenly Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God, and Heaven, in the New Testament, is either taken for that Eternal Reward prepared for those that believe, and obey the Doctrine of Christ, or else for that Doctrine it self revealed in the Gospel: so nearly are the Joys of Heaven and the Laws of Christ united; so surely, shall the possession of the one follow the practice of the other; that in the Word of God they are often both comprehended in the same phrase of the Kingdom of God.

This expression of receiving the Kingdom of God as a child, is best interpreted by our Liturgy, in the Office of Baptism; where it is said, *that By these words our Blessed Saviour exhorts all men to follow the innocence of little children.*

Whosoever therefore shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, that is, Whosoever shall not entertain and practise the word of God, with a true child-like simplicity and innocence, shall not enter therein; that is, shall not partake of the blessings of everlasting life.

The whole sense of my Text may be contained in two Propositions.

The first, That, for the right apprehending of the Doctrine of our Saviours Kingdom, the Gospel, there is required an ingenuous plainness, an unfeigned simplicity of mind, and understanding.

The second, That, for the sure inheriting of the joys of that Kingdom, we are all commanded to practise an undissembled integrity of life and manners.

Of these, the first that I am to recommend to you, is, that simplicity of mind, which is necessary for the right receiving of Divine Truth.

All wise Masters and Teachers, especially if they profess any Art, that is deep, out of the way, and of great use, are wont to expect in their Followers, some preparatory skill in other lower Arts, before they will proceed to teach them those that are higher. And here you see, our Blessed Saviour also requires his preparations, in those whom he will enlighten with his heavenly Doctrine. But in a way how much different, how much more condescending than that of the Teachers of all worldly, and Humane

Humane Arts! For towards the attaining of the most profound Wisdom, as is the knowledge of God; in the most useful study, as is the salvation of our own souls: what preparations does he exact? Only the docility, the innocence, the simplicity of children.

But, before we proceed farther, this Christian Simplicity must first be rightly stated, and well understood: For it has been often mistaken on both extremes. Some make it to consist in a blind Faith, as the Enthusiasts; some in a blind Obedience, as the Papists. The first conclude from hence for their wild illuminations, and groundless Inspirations, and deny all manner of use of their natural understandings, and judgments in Divine things: The other build on it the necessity of an absolute slavery of their understandings, and Consciences to their Spiritual Governours: whereas the true Evangelical simplicity should keep the sober, middle way between both these: It is so temper'd, as neither to extinguish the mans true natural light, nor invade the Christians just spiritual liberty.

First, I say, by this child-like simplicity
of

of mind, there is not intended any defect of the natural, or acquir'd abilities of our understandings, or any neglect of employing our understandings in examining the most spiritual Doctrines of the Gospel. As God did never require an entire perfection of Divine knowledge in any Christian, so much less did he ever injoyn an imperfection of natural knowledge in any Saint. 'Tis true, the things of God must be spiritually discern'd: But how so? not that they must be discern'd by other faculties of the soul, quite different from those, by which we discern natural Truth; but by the same faculties, only those rais'd, and more spiritually exercis'd.

Does not the Gospel tell us, that Gods is a *Reasonable Service*? It is our most reasonable Heb. 12. 1. duty, we being his Creatures: it is most conformable to right reason; it is the most noble object of it; it consists in sound, sober, intelligible Doctrines, in plain, practicable, rational Precepts. Of all the Creatures, none that we know of, are capable of Gods grace, and mercy, and redemption by Jesus Christ, but only Rational Creatures; not the brute Beasts, that are

below our way of understanding, nor Angels, that are above it. And therefore certainly that which does, in some sense, put mankind only into a possibility of being saved, cannot be wholly excluded in the great work of salvation: certainly it is not the natural weakness of little children, but their native candor; not their want of knowledge, but their docility that is here proposed to our imitation.

Nor secondly, does this receiving the Kingdom of God as a child, suppose any implicit obedience, or blind resignation of our understandings to all the Commands and Impositions of any one present Church, or pretended Head of it, as the only infallible Judg of all matters of Faith.

Obedience is indeed a virtue most acceptable to God, most beneficial to men: Unity is one of his greatest blessings: Communion is the most beautiful ornament of the Christian Church. And, thanks be to God, there may be as much Union, and Communion amongst Christians, as is necessary for the being, and convenient for the well-being of Christianity, without any such tyranny in the Governours of the Church,

Church, or servitude in its Members : without enslaving of private Conscience, which is Antichristian; and only by a moderate governing, and restraining of private Conscience, which is most Christian, as well as most essential to the preservation of human society.

The Church has a sacred and venerable Authority, as long as it teaches such Doctrines, and requires such Duties, as are agreeable to our Saviours. Whilst it does so, much reverence is due to it, much to the persons, more to the Doctrines, to the persons for their Doctrines sake; to the Doctrines for our Saviours sake. But if the name and title of the Holy Church of Christ shall be so abus'd, as to impose on our practice superstitious Precepts, as is the Worship of Saints, and some others; or on our understandings, incredible, impossible Doctrines, as is Transubstantiation, and the like; in such cases, you are free by the Laws of God, and Man: Your spiritual obligations do not bind you to believe such Doctrines, and your natural liberty, as well as your Christian, sets you free from obeying such Precepts.

Our blessed Saviour here expects, that we should receive his Laws, as children, but not as slaves. Those Laws may be sometimes severe, nay, they are imperial, and absolute, as they come from God; for he is our Lord: but even in respect to him, they are paternal too, for he is also our Father. They are deliver'd to us with a Royal Power, and sweetned by a fatherly tenderness; and they should be received by us, with the duty of subjects, with the affection of children: As children we should behave our selves to him, as children also to his Ministers, because they are to us in his stead: but still as children, not as mean vassals. The true Church of God is the Vice-gerent of Gods spiritual, paternal Authority, which the Sectaries unjustly deny it; but it is not the Vice-gerent of Gods uncontroulable, omnipotent, temporal Power, which the Church of *Rome* as unjustly usurps.

This being premised, we may now the better go on to examine, wherein the true, sincere, Christian simplicity consists, as to that part of it, which concerns the receiving of heavenly Truth.

If we consider the original example which we are here commanded to imitate, it seems that this blessed Temper is chiefly compos'd of three excellent virtues; of all which there is some weak resemblance in little children.

As the minds of children are generally clear, spotless, white, untainted, unprejudiced; as they are usually tender, gentle, pliable, capable of the best impressions; as children commonly receive their food, not with nicety, or with intent to quarrel at it, but willingly, and earnestly, for their increase and growth: so, in conformity to that innocent pattern, all the true followers of Christ should endeavour to obtain,

First, a plainness, and purity of understanding; such as is free from artifices, free from prejudices.

Secondly, a submissive and guidable spirit, a disposition easie to all; especially tractable to those, that have either a civil, or spiritual Authority over them.

Thirdly, an exact care so to learn the truths of Religion, that they may be employed for their true end, and best advantage, which is practice, and growth in

the duties of a pious, and devout life.

First, towards our right instruction in the Doctrines of the Gospel, we should all labour to bring our minds clear, unprejudiced, clean, uncorrupt. For the being void of errors, is the first great step to the greatest knowledge; and that understanding, in which though little is written, yet nothing is blotted; that which is not disfigured by ill impressions, is a subject most capable of the best. There nothing is required but plain teaching; whereas the mind that is either perverted by false knowledge, or made crooked by deceitful prejudices, must not only be taught, but first untaught that ill it had learn'd: and to unteach is a much more difficult work than to teach.

Such a pure, simple, undefil'd disposition of mind, by nature we cannot pretend to; bycause of the original corruption of our nature; but by the Grace of God in the Gospel we may attain it: and it is the chief design of the Gospel to direct us in the way to it.

That teaches us to cleanse, and repair by repentance, and amendment, our natural decays, and pollutions; to be constantly
watch

watchful in keeping our souls free from carnal, moral, nay, spiritual prejudices against Religion; to endeavour sincerely, that our minds be not often overthrown by violent passions, nor too much disordered by worldly affections; not seduced by secular ends, that secretly undermine the soul; not corrupted by bodily lusts, that openly war against the soul; especially that they be not infected by false Enthusiastical conceptions, concerning God, and Religion; which are wont most dangerously to insinuate themselves into the soul, as seeming to come from Heaven, and coming under the shadow of Religion it self.

The second part of this child-like simplicity, is to be teachable, and that in a right method, to be desirous of learning precepts, as well as truths; of truths to learn the plainest, and most useful, before the deepest and most subtle; of precepts to apply our selves to those that concern our selves, more than others.

This teachable humility is not only consistent with the greatest spiritual knowledg, but inseparable from it. 'Tis the property of all true knowledg, especially spiritual, to enlarge

enlarge the soul by filling it, to enlarge it, without swelling it; to make it more capable, and more earnest to know, the more it knows.

Even in natural things, whoever pretends to have learn'd so much, that he has no need, nor will to learn more, he has never learn'd any thing aright. And if this be so in natural things, in which the instruments, and helps of our knowledg are weak, and the objects of it finite; how much more is it so in Divine things? in which the instruments, the helps, the objects, the benefits of our knowledg are infinite. In Divine things to be always teachable, to be always learning, is not only the most certain way to Divine Wisdom, but even a good degree of Divine Wisdom it self.

The third part of such a true simplicity of understanding is a sincere desire, and unwearied endeavour to use, and improve our divine knowledg in a right manner, and to a right end. And what is the great, substantial, saving use, and end of all spiritual knowledg? Is it not to use it as children do their meat? to desire the *sincere milk of the word, as new born babes, that we may grow thereby?*

by? That we may grow thereby. And they who receive their spiritual food in such a manner, what they may want in a delicate appetite, they have in a wholesom; if they come short of others in the curiosity of their tast, they as much exceed them in the strength of their digestion: which in a spiritual life, as well as a natural, is a greater sign of a healthful constitution: whilst all other knowledg in Religion only serves to make a shew, and flashes away in discourse, this endures, and is solidly beneficial for sanctification here, for salvation hereafter.

Such is that simplicity of understanding, which is necessary for the right reception, increasing, and improving of our knowledg in the truths of the Gospel. I am next to consider that simplicity of manners, which should always accompany the sincere entertainment, and practice of the precepts of the Gospel.

This indeed has a very near connexion with the former. The head truly enlightened will presently have a wonderful influence in purifying the heart; and the heart really affected with goodness, will much conduce to the directing of the head. The be-

ginning of this blessed work is most commonly in the head, the perfection in the heart; but neither of them can be perfected without the other.

And what now is meant by the true, unfeigned, Christian simplicity of life, and manners, and conversation? we ought to be exceeding cautious on what kind of men we fix this character; for we live in an age, wherein, of all others, hypocrisie has put on the best counterfeited vizors, the most holy disguises.

First then, as I did before in the simplicity of understanding, so I must now do in this simplicity of heart: I must try to vindicate, and separate it from the mistakes, and extremes of it; and therefore I affirm, that it does not consist in any sullen separation, or affected purity, or demure contempt, and omission of the common customs, and usages, and fashions of this world. For most certainly, with such common things a Christian may comply, without danger, with true innocence and piety; and he may abstain from them, out of the greatest spiritual pride. Is not a morosity and singularity in such things often made a veil, and
cover

cover of licentiousness in greater things? have we not known it frequently us'd as an opportunity of the greatest moral dishonesty?

Must a Christian by the obligations of his holy profession, differ from, and abhor all the customary forms of civil life? how then could St. *Paul* become all things to all men? would he have conform'd universally to all sorts of men, if all manner of civil, or spiritual conformity had utterly been unlawful.

Must I with unmannerly freedom, affront Authority, despise the public Formalities of Government, live in a different way, put on another face, and garb, than the rest of my Country-men, and alledg the Christian simplicity to justify this my rudeness? what then will become of the Christian liberty, which in other cases these men so much magnifie? If this be Christian simplicity, was not the Mosaical severity a much lighter yoke? Did not our Blessed Saviour himself abolish all such Judaical reservedness and separation, at the very first founding of the Catholic Church? which, it is probable, had never been Catholic so

soon, if he had distinguished his Disciples from all the rest of mankind, as the Jews were, in every little circumstance, or custom of humane life. For whilst the true Religion it self was straitned by the Jewish, severe spirit; the Church of God was narrow in compass, confin'd almost to one Country, despis'd by all the world besides. It was the honest freedom, and universal charity of the Christian spirit, that first rent the veil, and enlarg'd its bounds, and spread its authority to the utmost ends of the earth: so that next to the Almighty Power of God, one of the chief occasions of the prodigious swiftness of the Churches first progress, was, that the Primitive Christians asserted the just liberties of humane nature; and set men free from the Jewish unreasonable sowerness, and harsh impositions.

'Tis true, we are commanded not to
 Rom. 12. 2. *be conform'd to this world*: But in the very next words, we have the true interpretation of that command. For it follows, *Be ye transform'd by the renewing of your mind*. It is a new mind, and the transforming of the heart; not new looks, or habits, or gestures, that Christianity requires. To the indif-
 ferent

ferent things of this world we may be, to the decent things of it we should be conformable; only to the wickedness, and corruptions of it we should not. No Christian is forbidden the honest skill, and practice, and prudence of this world; rather some are commanded it, all are allow'd it, only none must be perverted by it; all must use it, for higher, and more spiritual ends.

So far is the true Religion from obliging all its professors, either to withdraw wholly out of the world, or in conscience to avoid all the usual observances, and manners, or even the innocent delights of it, whilst they are in the world; that perhaps none are more capable, as of bringing more benefit to mankind, so of doing more service to God, or exercising more Evangelical Graces; than those men, that are of the most practical lives, and engag'd in most secular business. Greater will be their victory over the world, if they shall converse in it, without being defiled by it. If they shall labour to perform well all their natural, moral, political, and Religious Duties in it, most instructive will be the example of that Piety, most diffusive that Charity, which is

set on a hill so eminent, and plac'd in so good a light.

Were a Christian to be the Disciple of *John the Baptist*, he might then indeed think himself bound to follow the solitary, rigid life of his Master in the Wilderness: But seeing he is to be a Christian, he may be a Citizen of this world, as well, as of the *New Jerusalem*: He ought certainly to imitate a greater example than of *John the Baptist*, that of our blessed Saviour himself; who, though he too had his time of retirement in the Wilderness, yet liv'd not there; but was frequently in the Temple, convers'd generally in the City, with all sorts of people, went about every where doing good.

Luke II. 41. *Give alms, says our Saviour, of such things as you have, and behold all things are clean to you.* Let but a Christian perform the great, substantial duties of Christianity; and all other ordinary things are clean, and lawful to him. *All things*; of which some things were denied to the Jews: *all things*, that are not unclean in their own nature: those indeed can be lawful to none. The righteousness and holiness of the Gospel consists

not

not in doubting much ; but in living well : not in a zeal against little things , but for great things , in being *zealous for good Works.* Tit. 2. 14. Undoubtedly there may be as much superstition , in some cases , on a Religious account , to forbear doing what we lawfully may do ; as it is to do what we should not. Superstition transgresses on both extremes , and may offend as much in a too scrupulous forbearing , as in over-doing.

The true Christian Purity , and simplicity of life , that is here recommended , is therefore such , as is not bound to avoid all manner of compliance with the external fashions , and comely ceremonies of human life , and conversation. 'Tis enough , if it uses ceremonies , as ceremonies ; if it prefers the substance far before them , if it chiefly regards the inward reality. 'Tis such , as is not at all oppos'd to decency , or civility , or good manners , or good breeding ; but to craft , unjust artifice , guile , and dissimulation. 'Tis such , as , according to our Saviours own precept , must have *the harmlessness of the Dove* , and yet may have *the wisdom of the Serpent.* Mat. 10. 16. That wisdom , which single in the Serpent is hurtful , and poisonous ,
when

when it is temper'd with the innocence of the Dove, is most commendable, most useful.

1 Cor. 14.
20.

In a word, 'tis such a simplicity, as St. Paul the Christian put on, when he ceas'd to be Saul the Pharisee: such as St. Paul himself describes, when he thus exhorts the Corinthians: *Brethren*, says he, *Be not children in understanding; in malice be ye children, in understanding be ye men.* You see to all true Christians a manly understanding, is as much commanded, as a child-like purity: so that in the most Euangelical simplicity, the prudence, and discretion of a wise man may be, should be joyn'd with the native innocence, and inoffensive meekness of a little child.

You now behold the sum of those duties, to which, by the words of our Saviour in my Text, we are all oblig'd. They represent to us the necessity of a simplicity of mind, in receiving the Laws of Christ, and of an honest plainness of heart, in living accordingly: which indeed are the two principal things, that, in all true Religion, are to be studied, and practis'd by all good men.

Some

Some proportion, and degree of both these virtues, I say, is necessary to all Christians. I do not say, the highest and most complete degree of them to any: that is inconsistent with the frailties of our mortal condition, which God himself is pleased to consider, in the gentleness of his Precepts. His Laws are perfect, as he is perfect; holy, as he is holy: But, seeing we cannot be equally so, by reason of human infirmity, God is pleas'd to accept of integrity instead of perfection, to prefer simplicity before hypocrisie, confess'd ignorance, before presumption. What we really, and humbly endeavour, out of his abundant Grace, he will help us to perform, or accept of our endeavours. As we must strive to be children in innocence, so in his infinite goodness, he looks on us, to be but as children in weakness.

I am not ignorant, that this Doctrine of Christian simplicity may sound strange in the ears of those men, who consult only the low, and mean interests of this life; and therefore fancy themselves, in the proud imaginations of their own hearts, to be the only wise, and subtle men of this world.

With such men, simplicity generally passes in the worst sense, for pusillanimity, weakness, folly, for a poor-spirited Christian Grace, that amongst the antient Philosophers, they think, would scarce have escap'd the being reckon'd for a vice.

But let none be too hasty in condemning the true genuine simplicity: for I must tell them, it has always had an extraordinary preeminence, and dignity, not only in Religion, though chiefly there; not only in the sight of God, though that certainly were sufficient: but in all other things, in the judgment of all truly-wise men, in all the works of nature, and art, in all the best practice of civil life.

If we observe the order of the whole Creation, and the ranks of all things visible, and invisible, are not the highest, and most perfect Beings still most pure, most simple, and most of one nature? Thus it is from the noblest bodies to the souls of men, from the souls of men to Angels, from Angels to God himself: the higher any of these rise in their excellence, they are still the more simple in their essence.

If we examine all the productions of mens hands, or minds; is not the greatest perfection of all Art, a most exact imitation of true nature? There is some kind of easie, solid plainness, that far excels all the comeliness of artificial ornaments. There is some kind of simplicity that is attended with inexpressible majesty. That, says St. *Chrysostom* on those words of St. *Matthew*, like to these in my Text, that is the great design of all Philosophy, that is the very life of Angels, to have the highest understanding accompanied with unfeigned simplicity.

St. *Chrysost.* on
St. *Matth.* 19.
14. ἔτι καὶ
φιλοσοφίας ὄφει,
μετὰ συνέσεως
ἀπλασόν ἐστὶ
τὸ το βίον ἀγ-
γελικός.

If we reflect on the most polite customs and manners of human life, nothing is truly graceful, that is over-mix'd, or unnaturally forc'd; no word we speak, no phrase we use, no gesture, no tone of voice, that is over-artificial, but it presently offends: nothing in beauty, in habit, in action, in motion, can please, that is affectedly labor'd, and over-adorn'd: nothing has so much reverence in human conversation, as true ingenuity, manly plainness, gentle easiness, undissembled sincerity: nothing sooner, or more, or longer, affects men with delight; and love,

and admiration : nothing is more honorable , nothing more amiable , nothing indeed more easie , and safe . It is very probable , that more deep , dark , reserv'd , crafty men , have at last fail'd of their designs , even in this world , than the plain , upright , honest men . The crafty man has many parts to play , many minds to put on , many faces to shift ; so that it is almost impossible for him so to act all , as not to be discover'd in some , and then he will be suspected in all : whereas the honest man has but one part to perform , which is his own , and that far more easie for him to do ; bycause he always acts according to plain nature .

Thus even in all worldly things , as nothing is perfect without decence ; so nothing can be decent without simplicity . But above all things , this is true in Religion , especially in the Christian Religion . The Gospel , in the great Duties , and Truths of it , is a plain and simple thing ; it is simple in its end , which is one , and always the same , eternal life : simple in the means that conduce to that end , which are but two , and those always the same , Faith and Obedience . And so simple should be the
practice

practice of all, that would use those means in a right manner, and expect thereby the benefit of that end.

Nothing shews a nearer resemblance to the Divine Nature, than a mind that is pure, unmix'd, and undefil'd: nothing manifests a greater conformity to the Divine Laws, than a life of plain innocence: nothing more expresses that free, and generous disdain, which all true Christians have, or should have of these earthly, transitory things: nothing declares a more magnanimous confidence in the Divine Providence: nothing a more submissive resignation to the Divine will: nothing a more stedfast, and assured hope of future happiness: nothing can keep us safer from dangerous mistakes in all matters of eternal concernment.

The plain, fair, even, candid mind, of which a right measure may soonest be taken, is best prepar'd to take a right measure of spiritual things. That mild, and innocent disposition, which least of all deceives others, is least of all capable of being dangerously deceived it self, in the ways of everlasting salvation. Have not more bold, venturous, artificial wits fallen into errors,

than they, who have been content with the steady, constant, firm motion of meek, and humble Christians? Whilst those presume all on themselves, they trust to the most fallible guide: whilst these wholly suspect themselves, and implore most the grace of God, they never fail of a certain assistance, and direction. And what has been generally the success of both? the humble, teachable temper of the one has produc'd many real Saints: the proud, presumptuous, subtle spirit of the other has prov'd a fruitful soil for the production of Heretics, or Atheists.

Give me leave therefore most humbly to advise, and beseech you all, as you would be esteem'd the true Disciples of Christ, to labour for this blessed temper, which is most proper for Disciples, this humble and sincere practice of what you do know, this humble willingness to be taught what you do not know; and submission to those that do.

I do not by this, in the least, plead for the gross blindness, and implicit Faith of the Laity, which is one of the chief Artifices of the Church of *Rome*. No, we that are
Mini-

Ministers of the Church of *England*, may be content; nay, we may really wish, that all our Laity had as much true, solid understanding in Religion, as our Clergy. We can get no advantage by your want of knowledge, no more than you can do by ours. We have no spiritual cheat with which to delude you; for the representing of which we should stand in need either of darkness, or of a false light. We have nothing in our public profession, which the wisest men, the most pious Christians may not outwardly practice; nothing in our Faith, which they ought not inwardly to believe.

We know, and are well assur'd, that the only reason, why our Church is not more generally embrac'd, and admir'd, is, because the purity of its Doctrine, the sobriety of its Devotion, the moderation of its Discipline, the largeness of its Charity, are not more impartially, and calmly examin'd, more generally understood. Our Church in its Spiritual State, as you are Christians, is most conformable to the Rules of Christ, to the Apostolical practice, to the Primitive Institutions. In its Rational state, as
you:

you are men, its Doctrines are very agreeable to the reason of mankind ; its Precepts most becoming the purest, and the strictest laws of Nature, and Virtue, and Morality. In its Political state, as ye are *Englishmen*, its Interest is inseparable from the Interest of our Nation, and Government.

We are therefore so far from being jealous of your most curious, and exact search into the Practices, and Principles of our Church, that we desire it ; nay, we most earnestly beseech it. We are in no danger from mens most subtle inquiry into it ; we may be from their utter carelesness, and indifference towards it.

We are not against any mans seeing Spiritual Truth ; only we would not have the blind presume to teach others to see : we would not have men think they see, when they do not ; which is the most certain way for them never to see at all. We would have you know, as much as you can ; only we would have you believe that both you, and we, may know much more than we do : We intreat you to strive to know all, in a right way, by sober degrees, for right purposes, and uses, and ends.

Most

Most seasonable is this advice; and I wish it could be most effectually recommended. For, to speak plain truth, a meek, humble, teachable Spirit, and by consequence, a devout, peaceable, and obedient Spirit are almost quite gone out of the world: whereas all things in Religion should be plain, scarce any thing will now please, that is so: Whilst so many strive to be Teachers, and place most of their Religion in that, how many censurers have we of others? how many Reformers of the public? how few learners? how much fewer practisers themselves?

Alas! is it not apparent, that ever since so many of the Laity have so much invaded, so many have so much despised the Office of the Clergy; Pride has evidently prevailed over Humility, Faction over Unity, ill Nature over Charity?

Though I am not willing to make a Satyr on any Religious Party; nor do I think that the best way to reclaim them: our Consciences should convince their Consciences, 'our Lives should confute their Lives: else 'tis not enough only to employ our tongues, and our fancies against their

Consciences : yet for Truths sake, this I must say ; that of all the Sects amongst us, who contemn the Authority of the Church, who separate themselves from the great things of our Religion, on a dislike of some small things ; and amongst whom all think themselves gifted Brethren alike : Whatever other virtues, or shadows of virtues, they may seem to have ; whatever sobriety of Life, or strictness of Conversation, or freedom from some scandalous sins they may pretend to : For which yet I cannot but say, that if they are really such, as they pretend, I wish they were ours ; yet may they not generally be observ'd to be exceedingly defective in the two principal, Fundamental Graces of Christianity ? which are Humility , and Charity. Humility of looks, or habit they may have ; but have they as much of heart, or life ? Charity of Good Works do they not too much despise, as a low, legal way to Heaven ? Charity of Opinions , have they any at all ?

It cannot be denied , but in this last Age, in most of our memories, our Nation has manifestly degenerated from the practice of former times , in many Moral Virtues ,
and

and Spiritual Graces, which should teach us *to render to God, the things that are Gods, and to Cæsar the things that are Cæsars.* Where is that integrity of Manners, that truth of Conversation, that dutiful observance of Order, that modesty of Private Life, that Charity towards men, that humble Devotion towards God, in which, we can only say we have heard, our Nation once excell'd?

Twould be a melancholy employment to search into the causes of this unhappy change: but whatever other occasions may have contributed to the continuance and increase of it; certainly the chief cause of the beginning of it was Spiritual Pride, and Hypocrisie; the want, nay the contempt of an humble, and docible Spirit.

The different effects of this disposition, and of that, which is contrary to it, have been abundantly tried in all Histories, in all States, Civil, and Ecclesiastical; especially Ecclesiastical. Those Countries, and Societies of men have ever most flourish'd, where men have been kept longest under a reasonable Discipline, those, where the number of Teachers have been few in

comparison to the number of Learners. There was never yet any wise Nation, or happy Church, at least never any that continued long so: where all have thought themselves equally fit, and have been promiscuously admitted, to be Teachers, or Law-givers.

What can be the consequence of such a head-strong, stiff-necked, over-weening, unmanageable Spirit? can any thing be more destructive to Church, and State, than such a perverse humor, as is unteachable, ungovernable it self, and yet over-hasty to govern, and teach others? where Children get too soon out of the government of their Parents, and Masters: where men think it a Duty of Religion, to strive to get out of the Government of their Magistrate, and Prince: where Christians shall think themselves not at all bound to be under the Government of the Church, must not all domestic, and Politic, and spiritual Relations soon be dissolv'd? must not all order be speedily overthrown, where all the true ways to make, and keep men orderly, are confounded?

And what, in time would be the issue of such a confusion? what? but either gross ignorance, or false knowledge? which is as bad or worse: what? but a contempt of virtue, and prudence, under the disgraceful titles of pedantry, and formality? what? but a looseness of tongues, and lives? and at last mens taking pride in, and valuing themselves on such looseness? what but a disobedience to the Laws of man, in a pretence of the Kingdom of God; but, in truth, a neglect of all the Laws both of God, and man? In short, what but mad Enthusiasm first, and then licentious Atheism? for very near is the distance, very easie the passage from one of these extremes to the other.

Wherefore for these most pernicious distempers, the great prevention, the best remedy is this in my Text, *that we all receive the Kingdom of God as little children*: that children be carefully instructed in Religion, as children, whilst they are so: that our grown men, our wise men, especially our witty men, should not disdain to be as children, in respect of spiritual instruction: that the same modesty of opi-

nions, and duty to Governours, and submission to Instructors, which children have by nature, without any experience, they would strive to have by choice, as the main end of, and best means to improve their greatest wit, and experience.

Lam. 3. 27. *'Tis good for a man that be beareth the yoke in his youth. 'Tis good for him that beareth it, not only for human society : 'Tis good to bear the yoke ; the severest direction, the hardest restraint ; much more to yield to the tenderness of counsel, the easiness of instruction, the wholsom severities of Discipline.*

First then, in the name of God, may the means of Education, the times of Institution, the rules of Discipline, the Laws of Government, the distance and duties of Inferiors to Superiors, of all degrees, be most seriously regarded : that our men may be brought up to business, to professions, fitted for the world, for Heaven, by the laborious methods of virtue, and knowledge, and obedience, by an exact Rule, by sure degrees : no matter how slow, so they be but sure ; better too slow than too precipitate.

And

And lastly, may our men of ripe years, our men of business, our great men be intreated to revive, and restore the ancient simplicity, and integrity of manners: to practise an inward humility, and lowliness of mind; an outward innocence towards all, condescension to Inferiors, observance of Superiors, submission to Teachers, subjection to Rulers: and to practise all these excellent virtues, not only as so many moral, or political Duties, but, as indeed they are, as some of the most Christian, most Spiritual, and most Evangelical Graces.

Thus for us all to become as Children, is the surest way to preserve where it is, to recover where it was lost, private virtue, public honesty, and a national piety.

And by the words of our Saviour in my Text, I am impowred to promise to this blessed Temper, an eternal Reward. For if *whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein*: Hence we may well conclude, that whosoever shall receive it as a child, shall enter therein. For of such, says our Saviour, *is the Kingdom of God*. Of which I beseech Almighty God to make us all partakers. Amen.

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