

SERMON III

GEORGE MARSH, THE MARTYR OF DEANE.

THE PROTEST.

"He being dead, yet speaketh."—Hebrews xi. 4.

WHEN we parted with our dear friend George Marsh, on Sunday last, it was "with his book in his hand, looking upon the same." Have your Bibles since then been much in your hands, more, perhaps, than they were wont to be? Have you looked more carefully, are you day by day intending, God being your helper, to look more carefully into the Book of books? If not, you are not worthy descendants or fellow-parishioners of George Marsh, the Martyr. George Marsh's Bible was not on the shelf, covered with a week's or a fortnight's dust. It was not hoarded up amongst the holiday clothes. It had not to be sought for when it was wanted. It was in his hand, and he looking upon it. And a glorious privilege it is, brethren—the most precious of all our Protestant privileges—that we have the Bible now in our native tongue—no longer so scarce a volume as to be chained, as it was in George Marsh's time, to the desk of the parish church, but a Bible for every man; and every man, but by his own fault, able to look into it. The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, the touchstone of doctrine, the rule of life—"Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation" (Art. vi). So George Marsh, being dead, yet spake to us last Sunday night. It was for stoutly standing by this same speech three hundred years ago that he lost his life. To-night I intend him to tell us what were the chief things which were required of him as articles of faith and necessary to salvation—which, had he acknowledged, he might even at the last moment have received a free pardon—which he tried by the touchstone of Holy Scripture, and not finding them therein, died rather than cease to protest against them. "He being dead, yet speaketh."

I. The first, then, of the four questions which were proposed to him, and on his answers to which his life depended was, "Whether the mass, now used in the Church of England, was according to Christ's institution, and with faith, reverence, and devotion, to be heard and seen?" His observation upon this first question is, "The first I denied." Here it must be explained that the mass in the Romish Church is the service for the celebration of that which we call the Lord's Supper; but they of that Church, as will appear presently from the consideration of the second question, the offering up of the body and blood of Christ. The mass is always sung or intoned in a low voice in the Latin language, and with such a prodigious number and variety of ceremonies, postures, genuflexions, crossings, ablutions, lifting up of hands and eyes, and other histrionic gestures, all accurately described and authoritatively ordered by the canon of the mass, as fill four whole pages in the large folio edition of Fox's "Book of Martyrs." For example, I will quote a few lines of these four folio pages of directions:—"Here let the priest lift up his hands and join them together, and afterwards wipe his fingers—here let him lift up his eyes—here let him bow down, and afterwards erect himself up a little—here let him touch the host—here let him bow himself—here let him lift up the chalice a little—here let him lift the chalice to his breast—here let him set down the chalice again and rub his fingers over the chalice. Then let him lift up his arms and cover the chalice. Then let him lift up his arms crosswise, his fingers being joined together," &c. Now, of all this George Marsh speaks thus—"He asked what offended me in the mass? I answered, the whole mass offended me: first, because it was in a strange language, whereby the people were not edified, contrary to St. Paul's doctrine (1 Cor. xiv. 8). "' For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? ' And because of the manifold and intolerable abuses and errors contained therein contrary to Christ's priesthood and sacrifice." So spake George Marsh on the mass—"I deny it," he said.

II. The second question which was proposed to George Marsh was, "Whether the Almighty, by the words pronounced by the priest, did change the bread and wine, after the words of the consecration, into the body and blood of Christ, whether it were received or reserved?" This question referred to the doctrine of transubstantiation, in which the Papists teach that, by the prayer of the priest, the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper are changed into the actual body and blood of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and in which originate manifold other corruptions, such as the adoration of the host or victim as the elements are then called; the esteeming the offering of it a repetition of Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin; the reserving it, carrying it in processions, and a variety of other less important superstitions. "The second —namely, the above question on transubstantiation, Marsh says—I answered as I did to my Lord before, and as is above written." The previous answer here referred to is as follows— "I answered, I believed that whosoever according to Christ's institution did receive the holy sacrament of Christ's body and blood, did eat and drink Christ's body and blood, with all the benefits of His death and resurrection, to their eternal salvation; for Christ, said I, is ever present with His sacrament. Then asked they me whether the bread and wine, by virtue of the words pronounced by the priest, were changed into the flesh and blood of Christ; and that the sacrament, whether it were received or reserved, was the very body of Christ? Where-unto I made answer, I knew no further than I had shown already; for my knowledge is imperfect, said I, desiring them not to ask me such hard and unprofitable questions." In another examination before the Popish Bishop of Chester, "he utterly denied transubstantiation, and allowed not the abuse of the mass." And in one of his letters he writes as follows—"They sin willingly who of a set malice and purpose do withhold the truth in unrighteousness and lying, kicking against the manifest and open known truth which, although they do perfectly know that in all the world there is no other sacrifice for sin but only that all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ's death, yet notwithstanding they will not commit themselves wholly unto it; but rather despise it, allowing other sacrifices for sin invented by the imagination of man, as we see by daily experience; unto whom, if they abide still in their wickedness and sin, remaineth a most horrible and dreadful judgment." So spake George Marsh on the subject of transubstantiation. He spake pretty much as our Articles speak:—"Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner; and the mean whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is faith. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up or worshipped" (Art. xxviii). And again: "The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifice of masses, in the which it was commonly said that the priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt were blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits" (Art. xxxi).

III. The third question which was put to Marsh was, "Whether the lay people ought to receive but under the form of bread only, and that the one kind was sufficient for them?" To this he says, "I answered that the lay people by Christ's institution ought to receive under both kinds, and that it sufficeth not them to receive under the one kind only." In another place he said, "Christ's institution was plain that all men should drink of the cup." This great abuse, so manifestly opposed to Christ's own words (Matt. xxvi. 27), "Drink ye all of it," originated in the great fundamental error of transubstantiation. For the wine being once pronounced to be the actual blood of Christ it soon came to be thought better to deny it altogether to the laity, than run the least risk of spilling so holy and precious an element. On this head our Art. xxx. speaks as follows: "The cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the lay people; for both the parts of the Lord's sacrament, by Christ's ordinance and commandment, ought to be ministered to all Christian men alike."

IV. The fourth and last question put to the Martyr was, "Whether confession to the priest, as now used in England, was godly and necessary?" To this he replied, "That, though confession auricular was a convenient means to instruct the rude people, yet it was not necessary nor commanded of God." The necessity of auricular and compulsory confession of sins to a priest in order to receive absolution, as a duty commanded by God and in nowise to be neglected, George Marsh altogether denied. Had he been as fully aware, as the world in general is now, of the horrible consequences of auricular confession as practised in the Roman Church; of the diabolical character of the examination proposed to the person confessing; of the awful sins often suggested by and even committed in consequence of such sort of examinations, it is probable that the Martyr would have spoken on this head in even stronger language than he did. He would have seen that the only safe, because the only scriptural, course in this matter, is that adopted in her Visitation Service by the Reformed Church of England where a voluntary confession of such sins as trouble the conscience is invited, but not prescribed as a necessary duty; and still less wrung out by a process of examination calculated to suggest many an evil thought never before entertained. "I acknowledge my sins unto thee," is the language of the Psalmist unto God: Psalm xxxii. 5. "Confess your faults one to another/" is the recommendation of James v. 16. But nowhere in Holy Scripture is the peremptory order of the Roman Church written, "Confess to the priest."

Such were the four questions, on his answers to which the life of George Marsh depended. Such were the bold and uncompromising answers which he gave, signing with his own hand his dreadful doom, rather than by one jot or one tittle add to or diminish from the written Word of God. In other parts of his life and writings we find censure incidentally passed in the same undaunted spirit upon other corruptions and mummeries of the Church of Rome. Thus he says in one place, "The bishop being at Lancaster, there set up and confirmed all blasphemous idolatry, as holy water casting, procession gadding, matins mumbling, mass hearing, idols setting-up, with such heathenish rites forbidden by God; but no Gospel preaching, which Christ, God's Son, so earnestly commanded." In another place he speaks of those "who, with all probability of words and philosophy, or worldly wisdom and deceitful vanity, after the traditions of men and the beggarly ordinances of the world, but not after Christ, as it were all singing one song, went about to persuade him to submit himself to the Church of Rome and to acknowledge the Pope to be the head thereof, and to interpret the Scriptures none otherwise than that Church did; with many such like arguments and persuasions of fleshly wisdom." In another place he says, "The glory of Christ's Church, I see it well, doth not stand in the harmonious sound of bells and organs; nor yet in the glistening of mitres and copes; neither in the shining of gilt images and lights, as the Papists do judge it; but in continual labours and daily afflictions for His name's sake." Such sentiments as these, though, as has been before observed, they form no part of the examination which led to the martyrdom of George Marsh, are nevertheless peculiarly valuable at this present season, when the imitation of such like Roman mummeries as are here condemned, in the very bosom and by the ministers of the Church of England itself, is fraught with danger infinitely greater and more certain than any which is likely to arise from Papal Rome. Against the mass, then—against transubstantiation—against denying the cup to the laity—against auricular confession—against mummeries and superstitions of all sorts, kinds, and descriptions, George Marsh, the Martyr, though dead, yet, with a voice almost as searching as the flame which separated his perishing body from his immortal soul, speaketh to us assembled here this night.

First, he speaketh to me—to me, after an interval of three hundred years, his successor as the pastor of the flock of Jesus Christ in this parish of Deane, Yea, he speaketh to me. From "under the altar," from amongst "the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held/" Rev. vi. 9, I seem even now to hear the blessed Martyr's voice. He sees me, as I this night stand where three hundred years ago he stood himself. He being dead, yet speaketh unto us. He says to me, "Come out from among them, and be thou separate and touch not the unclean

thing," Cor. vi. 17. Draw not nigh to Rome, no not even in things indifferent. Thine own soul, the souls of thy people, depend upon whether thou art a faithful minister and witness or not. Perish rather thy body in the flames, as mine perished, than risk eternal burning for them! Keep at a distance from "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth," Rev. xvii. 5, lest she beguile thee with her blandishments. Keep far even from the brink of the whirlpool, lest it suck thee in! Flee from every thing Romish! Canst thou in thy ministrations add to the simple ritual of the Church of England, for the celebration of the Supper of the Lord, Romish pomp and ceremony? Canst thou add credence tables, changes of posture, ablutions, lifting up of hands and eyes, bowings and crossings, processions and such like? Canst thou do this without becoming thyself insensibly persuaded, and leading thy flock to become persuaded of much, perhaps in time, of all the deadly doctrine of the mass? — without looking almost unconsciously to the bread and wine as a Saviour rather than the means of access to the only one Saviour? — without regarding thyself, not as a minister, but a mediator? — and seating the bride, the Church, upon the throne of the heavenly Bridegroom? Dost thou dare to sing the very same song that Papists sing? Dost thou dare, little less than if like the Roman priest thou ministered in a strange tongue, to stand in the way of the edification of the people by intoning or muttering in a low voice those eloquent prayers, in which it was intended that all should join in approaching the Throne of Grace? Dost thou dare, by imitating almost heathen mummeries and superstitions, to lead men's minds away from the one thing needful? The vain traditions and ordinances of men, which, rather than acknowledge to be the Word of God, I perished at yonder stake — with these dost thou presume to tamper? — So, being dead, my martyred predecessor, brethren, even now speaketh to me. Marvel not at my earnestness, when I have such a testimony ringing in my ears. I hear it. I exceedingly fear and quake. I pray God, that, like George Marsh, I may never know anything amongst you save Christ crucified.

He speaketh to me. Yet not to me alone. To you, brethren, this night, as on former nights, he likewise speaketh. He says, use diligently, while you have them, your Protestant privileges! The simple worship of this house of prayer, offered without pomp to the Throne of Grace, attend it! The beautiful Liturgy of the Church of England plainly prayed, with heart and soul and voice, join in it! The Supper of the Lord, simply and unpretendingly offered as a means of grace, receive it! "If (says George Marsh) we hunger and thirst after righteousness, let us resort unto His table, for He is a most liberal feast-maker. He biddeth, willeth, and calleth for guests who hunger and thirst. Come, saith He, all you that labour and are laden, and I will refresh you, cool, and ease you, and you shall find rest unto your souls." Vain it is for the minister to keep clear of Roman superstition unless the people, by a diligent use of them, show their value for Protestant privileges. I take God to witness, brethren, it is no vain boast, that, sooner than willingly lead one single soul amongst you astray from "the truth as it is in Jesus," I would perish at the stake at which my predecessor perished. O Lord Jesus, grant that the words which George Marsh, being dead, has spoken both to my flock and myself this night, may before thy second coming to judge the world, by the operation of thy Holy Spirit, assist in making me a "faithful messenger," and my hearers an "acceptable people."