

SERMON V.

WHAT IS PUSEYISM?

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."—Colos. ii. 8.

I AM not particularly fond of preaching upon what may be called controversial subjects. My habit, as you are well aware, usually is, to drive away error by setting forth truth. The course of events, however, has of necessity led you to hear much of Puseyism, Tractarianism, Anglo-Catholicism, and such like. I think, therefore, it will be interesting—nay useful—indeed, since they are of a very beguiling character that it is even my duty, as a matter of warning, shortly and plainly to explain to you what is meant by these terms; for they all, in truth, mean the same thing. The name "Puseyism" is derived from Dr. Pusey, one of the learned professors at the University of Oxford. Tractarianism is an expression derived from a series of Tracts, in which the first principles of the system we are speaking of were developed; and Anglo-Catholicism is, as far as I understand it, a term by which it is sought to imply that the new system is a revival of the practices of the branch of the Catholic Church anciently founded in England. But, as I said before, all these terms are in common made use of to describe the same system.

The history of the whole matter, then, is as follows. In the year 1883 the series of Tracts already alluded to was commenced at Oxford. The writers were almost all without exception very learned and very pious men. Their zeal was great. Their desire to do good was unbounded. They felt, and truly felt, that there was a vast amount of abuse which much needed a remedy, and they set about the work in good earnest. Would that they had been possessed of discretion equal to their zeal! Would that they had not taken for their guide the word of man, rather than the Word of God! The movement thus vigorously commenced soon gathered strength, and rapidly advanced. One strange doctrine after another was set forth in quick succession. As the foundation of them all—the very same foundation on which all the lies of Popery are built up—it was declared that great caution and reserve was to be observed in preaching the Gospel, the more mysterious truths of which were by no means to be proclaimed to the generality of persons; and that no layman had any right to presume to interpret any portion of Scripture for himself, but must give himself up wholly to the guidance of the Church and the Clergy; or, as it was then intimated they should be called, the Priesthood. The free use of God's Word being thus denied, "the tradition of men, the rudiments of the world," were very easily set up in its place. It was taught that Churches by the act of consecration were not merely, according to the usual understanding, formally set apart by the bishop from all profane uses, and dedicated to the service of God alone; but derived a sort of intrinsic holiness, such as demanded for them almost the same reverence and respect as belong to Almighty God Himself. The communion table, as it is pointedly called in the Prayer Book, was now spoken of as the altar, and was set forth as being of such an intrinsically holy character as that even to lean upon it was irreverent. Much ceremony was introduced in placing the bread and wine upon this altar, as though, according to the Papists' creed, they were the real body and blood of Christ Himself; to facilitate which an additional table, called the "credence table," unknown before in the ritual of the Reformed Church, but borrowed from that of Rome, was introduced. In order to pave the way for further innovation, it was now set forth in the most notorious of all the Tracts, No. 90r that the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England might be signed by the clergy with such mental reservation as would admit of their interpreting them in almost any sense they pleased. Architecture, music, painting, sculpture, pomp, and pageantry, were then all invited to their aid; and many were beguiled by their taste for such things to depart from the simplicity of the Reformed Church of England ritual. And in order, as far as possible, to assimilate the manner of performing the service to that of Rome in a language not understood by the people, the system of intoning the

prayers, as it is called, was introduced—a system which makes the beautiful prayers of our ritual, in which it is evident all were intended to join, little less unintelligible to uneducated people than if they were put up in the Latin language itself. The clergy, or the priests as they are called, themselves began now to affect superior sanctity and to hold themselves aloof from the laity. They called themselves the Church, and then exalted the Church into the place of Him who is Head over all things to the Church, even Jesus Christ our Lord. They revived many old practices: some of which, such for instance as preaching in the surplice instead of the gown, are matters of perfect indifference either way; but certainly not to be revived at the risk of giving offence to weaker brethren: others, such as bowing and crossing themselves, and turning at one portion of the service in one direction, at another in the opposite, oftentimes studiously with their back to the congregation, downright superstitious and Popish. Thus for about eighteen years the movement has gone on, some joining it from one motive, some from another: many carried away by zeal without discretion—many by love of singularity and display—many by a taste for the fine arts— many by that restless desire for novelty so common to human nature: all these motives being concluded under the "vain deceit" of the text; and not a few through "philosophy," a too sedulous reading and too confident trust in the writings of men, the writings of the fathers and such like, to the neglect and disparagement of the Word of God. Step by step this movement has advanced, till at length in more than one church in London, as well as in others in several parts of the country, the whole fitting-up and furnishing of the building, as well as the manner of conducting the service, even to the carrying of the cross in procession and the lighting up of huge candles upon the altar in broad daylight, is so from beginning to end entirely Romish, that if you or I, who have not been gradually and step by step accustomed to these changes, were to enter them, we should be persuaded that we had entered by mistake a Popish chapel. Meanwhile the clergy who officiate in such churches carry out still further their Romanizing views, by calling upon their people to confess their sins to them, appointing them penance, granting them absolution, wearing as far as possible the dress of Popish priests, establishing convents and sisterhoods of mercy, and insisting upon that rigid discipline in the administration of the parishes committed to their care, which, though still owing to unrepealed canons and rubrics according to the letter of the law legal, have nevertheless by common consent long since fallen into disuse, and by their revival only tend to drive men away from, rather than lead them to, Christ. Such is a short account of Puseyism, Tractarianism, Anglo-Catholicism, call it which you please—a system which the more it is examined will. I think, all the more be found to be more strictly akin to that Judaizing system so strongly condemned by St. Paul in the text. The object of both is exactly the same—namely, to add to the simple truth as it is in Jesus the tradition of men and the rudiments of the world, and to exalt the Church into the place of Christ.

Now, the effect of all this has been very grievous. In some places, where there is no other church, those of the inhabitants who did not sympathise in such things have left the communion of the Church altogether and became Dissenters, or have got into habits not easy to be laid aside of idling away the Sabbath without going to any place of religious worship at all. On the other hand, those who have been beguiled into the adoption and love of such opinions and practices have been, what in the language of the text is called<: spoiled"—that is to say, turned away from Christ, and robbed of any real foundation for hope, comfort, and salvation. They have had their minds diverted from the only wholesome consideration for sinners, that, namely, of their own lost estate and their need of a Saviour's perfect righteousness to a dependence on the performance of certain rites and ceremonies, the saying a certain number of prayers, or keeping a certain number of fasts and festivals. Some have walked upon the very verge of rebellion by denying the Queen's supremacy; and not a few, clergy as well as laity, have actually apostatized from the Reformed Church of England and become members of the Roman Church. Meantime this adoption of Roman doctrine and imitation of Roman practices in the Church of England, and actual falling away of some to the Church of Rome, have no doubt in great measure been the cause of leading the Pope and his advisers into the egregious error of supposing that this country was ripe for conversion, and in consequence

produced the late aggression on the Queen's supremacy by the appointment of a cardinal archbishop and bishops. That part of the affair need be a subject of no alarm. It will be dealt with, as it deserves, by our rulers. It will tend to weaken, rather than strengthen, the cause of Romanism in this country; and in God's hands it may possibly prove an instrument of opening the eyes of those in our own communion, who, in the manner above described, have been almost but not quite spoiled "through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ," who are standing on the threshold, but have not yet quite passed into Rome.

No wonder, then, that the apostle cries, "Beware!" No wonder that we, his successors, take up the warning voice! With so many around doing their very utmost to spoil you—with such dangerous weapons in their hand as philosophy and vain deceit—with such miserable substitutes for Christ as the tradition of men and the rudiments of the world—no wonder that in times like these we stand upon our watch-tower and loudly exclaim, "Beware lest any man spoil you!" Beware—there is much need of caution : for the enemy is very cunning and very persevering. The line which separates between truth and falsehood is almost invisible. Men pass it almost without knowing. So finely is the boundary drawn that you may hold Christ today—to-morrow nothing but the tradition of men, the rudiments of the world. So easy and gradually are the steps on this beguiling way that you may be to-day Churchmen, to-morrow Tractarians, next day Papists. This shows the danger of drawing too near the line—the safety of keeping as far as possible from the edge of the precipice ! Beware, then, lest any man spoil you. Beware, lest a taste for music, painting, sculpture, architecture, spoil you. Beware, lest a taste for show and pageantry spoil you. Beware, lest a love of learning and philosophy spoil you. I often tremble when I see my friends giving their minds so entirely to such things, unconscious that they are all the while being led away from Christ—Christ who lived for us—Christ who died for us—Christ who even now is in heaven pleading for us—Christ who is soon about to come once again to judge us—Christ, in comparison of whom the philosophy, the vain deceit, the tradition of men, the rudiments of the world, are absolutely as nothing—Christ, without whom there is no hope here nor happiness hereafter. Oh no—rather beware lest any man spoil you of Christ!

Deane, Nov. 24th, 1850.