

SERMON VII.

THE CANDLE BEFORE THE CANDLESTICK.

"Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent-and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candle -stick out of his place, except thou repent."—Rev. ii. 4-5.

THE candlestick is made entirely and exclusively for the service of the candle—to hold the candle, and to lift it up that it may give a better light, to afford facility for carrying it about— such are the uses of the candlestick. But without the candle, or in the place of the candle, the candlestick is simply useless. The employment, then, in the text of this, the use of which is so well understood, as a figure under which to represent the Church of Ephesus, serves to set before us in a very clear and intelligible light the exact relation between Christ and His Church or any branch of it. Christ is the candle John viii. 12—" I am the light of the world," he says of Himself. Christ is the candle, for whose service, and in order to show whose glory to the world, the Church and its ordinances have been instituted. Let this candlestick presume to leave its "first love, to abandon the object for which it was made, and to step into the place of the candle, it will speedily be removed out of its place. Now, just as last Sunday, it was my object to explain to you how that superstitious reverence for the material building of the Church, which is encouraged by the Tractarians, is in reality nothing more nor less than giving God's glory to another; so, to-day, it is my purpose to show you that the Church spiritual and its ordinances may likewise be subject to be so overrated as to be made to usurp the place of Christ—the candlestick to be accounted of as though it were the candle. This likewise is a part and parcel of the Tractarian system. It is a part of the system which even if it did not, as in truth it does, lead rapidly towards Rome, must at any rate, in as far as it is cherished, lead to self-righteousness, instead of a humble and unconditional dependence on Christ. The one is the rotten foundation on which is built the idolatrous Church of Rome: the other is the Rock on which rests the pure and apostolical Reformed Church of England. It is most important to detect and expose a system by which a mine is being secretly worked beneath that rock, such as, if sprung, will shake the goodly building erected on it, even to the removal of it out of its place.

The views, then, of the party in question, concerning the efficacy of being members of the Church, are most extravagant. The outcry against those who do not belong to the Church are, of course, proportionably loud. Here, however, it must be carefully borne in mind that I am not now speaking of the Universal Church of Christ, of membership with which faith in Christ working by love is the only test ordained in holy Scripture, but of the Church of England—the Church of the Prayer Book, the Articles, and Canons. In the first sense it is clearly impossible to overrate the value of being a member of the Church; because those who are not so are clearly without the pale of salvation. Whereas, in the other sense, it is very possible to overrate Church-membership very much; because it is very possible to be in that sense members of the Church, and yet not at all in the way of salvation. Are you members of the Church? Do you act up to Church rules? Such are the questions which take the place of those much more concerning enquiries—are you in Christ? Are you new creatures? If we were to judge from many modern sermons, we should be inclined to suspect that the advent of the Church, rather than that of Christ, was the subject of those glad tidings of great joy which the heavenly Host first proclaimed to the shepherds of Bethlehem, and the pastors of Christ's flock are commissioned to preach to every creature. I believe the Church of the Prayer Book, the Church of England, to be the most pure and apostolical branch of Christ's Church in existence. I therefore rejoice in the privilege of being a member and a minister of it. I cannot, however, look upon it as the only branch of Christ's Church in which salvation is to be found. I cannot believe that it is absolutely necessary to belong to it in order to be saved. I cannot even bring myself to think but that some who dissent from it may be endued with a larger measure of saving faith, and therefore more truly members of Christ's Universal Church, and nearer to salvation, than

some who belong to it. Were I to think otherwise, I believe that I should be exalting the candlestick into the place of the candle; that which is designed to lead to Christ into the place of Christ Himself. The Church of England I look upon as a candlestick: not the only but a very precious candlestick—a candlestick of pure gold twice refined. As such I honor and highly prize it, not for its own sake, but because it lifts up the candle so high and brightly. But extinguish the candle and set the candlestick in its place, the darkness which inevitably follows convinces me at once that all is wrong. As a road, the safest road towards Christ, I prize the Church; but, if it be held up as the end of the journey, I have nothing more to say to it.

We have now come to the two sacraments. These, likewise, were ordained by Christ as means to an end. They were intended as part of the candlestick, and for the purpose of showing forth the candle. Matt, xxviii. 19—"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Luke xxii. 19—"This do in remembrance of me." 1 Cor. x. 16—"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" The sacraments were evidently both ordained in order to bring men to Christ: the one, the means of bringing them into covenant with Him; the other, of strengthening and refreshing their remembrance of and communion with Him. They are both means of grace, not grace itself. They are both ways leading to an end—namely, Christ; but neither of them the end itself. As long as they are used as ways and means, so long they answer the purpose for which they were instituted, and, with God's blessing, lead those who use them faithfully nearer and nearer to Him who alone has saved their souls alive. On the other hand, once let them be used independently of the end towards which they were designed to lead, and they not only lose all their efficacy, but tend at once to that greatest of all stumbling-blocks in the way of true godliness—self-sufficiency and righteousness. If a man, for instance, once becomes even in the least degree possessed with the notion that because he is baptized he must, as a matter of course, be saved; or that the mere eating and drinking the sacramental bread and wine will serve to atone for the sins he has committed, is he not being led day by day further and further from an unconditional dependence on Christ, nearer and nearer to entire self-righteousness? Is he not mistaking the candlestick for the candle? And in the end, when he looks for light, will he not find himself in the dark? These views, it is well known, are fully developed in the Church of Rome. The mere partaking of a sacrament is, according to the doctrine of that Church, accounted invariably efficacious. In the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine, instead of mere elements and means of remembrance and communion, are exalted into the body and blood of Christ. The practice of the Tractarians all leads in the same direction and conducts to the same end. The esteeming the east end of the Church peculiarly holy, the calling the communion-table the altar, the bringing the bread and wine up to the altar in procession and with frequent prostration, the consecration of the elements in a low tone and with the back turned to the people, the pomp and ceremony, prostrations and ablutions, with which the whole transaction is accompanied—what can all this lead to but to the looking upon the sacrament, not as a means of grace, but as grace itself? What is it but the putting the candlestick in the place of the candle? If I wanted to bring all my flock over to a belief in the whole Roman doctrine of transubstantiation, what better preparation could I use?

The fault found with the Church of Ephesus was that it had left its "first love," had "fallen," had ceased doing its "first works." It had once been sound in doctrine and faithful in Christ; but had since declined and transferred its affections elsewhere. The candlestick had held up the candle properly for a time, but had since stepped out of its place. Was it any justification that it had been much in works, labour, patience, and trial? Verse 2—"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake

hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Works the most laborious were not here accepted as any justification of the fall complained of. The threat was unconditional and, decisive. There must be a complete reversal of the past. The candlestick must resume its lost character, or be removed out of its place.

Nor will it avail to say, as I have often heard it said, that those who hold these extreme and unscriptural views of the Church and the sacraments are most earnest, laborious, self-denying, men. Granted that they are so. But in whose service are they earnest, laborious, and self-denying? According to their own views, in the service of Christ; but, according to the Scriptures, clearly not. Would that their earnestness, laboriousness, and self-denial, were in the service of a better cause and a better master! Would that they restricted the candlestick to its own proper use, and looked for light, not to it, but to the candle! It cannot be. Nothing but such repentance as leads to a doing of the first works will avail to stand between the Church of England and the anger of a slighted God. Her foes are they of her own household. The danger which threatens her existence is cherished within herself. I enter my most solemn protest against any, either doctrine or practice, which in any, even the slightest, degree, inclines men to exalt either the Church or its ordinances into the place of Christ, to lead towards whom is the sole end of their institution. Not enemies from without, but they who from within are thus sapping the foundations of the Church of England, are most to be guarded against. They who will lift the candlestick into the place of the candle are the parties through whose instrumentality, it is most to be feared, will be brought about the judgment—"I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

Deane, Second Sunday in Lent, 1851.