

## SERMON II.

GEORGE MARSH, THE MARTYR OF DEANE.

THE BIBLE.

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

OUR parting prayer, brethren, on Sunday evening last, was in the words of George Marsh the Martyr himself. Plain, simple, unstudied, and unaffected, but at the same time, from the deep strain of devotion and humility in which it was expressed, eloquent and heart-stirring, such as saints might well utter, angels echo, and the Son of God Himself, the Almighty Intercessor, carry to the foot of the throne of grace, was this prayer of the faithful Protestant Martyr. Psalm xxxix. 3, "My heart was hot within me: while I was musing, the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue." This was the spirit in which that beautiful prayer was conceived. What, then, in the case of George Marsh, produced that hearty, earnest, affectionate, spirit? What is likely to produce the same state in us? Hear the Martyr's own words on this subject, written immediately before the prayer itself. "Beloved, he says, amongst other exercises, I do daily on my knees use this confession of sins, willing and exhorting you to do the same, and daily acknowledge unfeignedly to God your unbelief, un-thankfulness, and disobedience against Him. This shall ye do, he adds, if ye will diligently consider and look yourselves first in the pure glass of God's commandments, and there see your outward filthiness and uncleanness, and so learn to vanquish the same, that is, to wit, to fall in hearty displeasure against sin, and thereby be provoked to long after Christ." Here, then, is the secret spring of earnestness in prayer. A longing after Christ is provoked by a hearty displeasure against sin. This arises from a conviction of personal filthiness and unclean-ness, and a desire to vanquish the same. All are produced by a diligent looking at ourselves in the pure glass of God's commandments. In other words, in order to be earnest in prayer, we must be diligent readers of our Bibles. And it is on this subject, the diligent use namely of God's written Word, that I intend, by citing a few passages from his life, to endeavour to make George Marsh the Martyr, though dead, yet speak to you a few living words this evening.

It was his desire of "Godly Studies" that first led the Martyr, as we heard last Sunday, to quit the much more profitable occupation of a farmer for preparation for holy orders at the University of Cambridge. We have already heard him tell us, during his imprisonment at Lancaster, "I and my fellow prisoner, Warburton, every day kneeling on our knees, did read Morning and Evening Prayer, with the English Litany every day twice, both before noon and after, with other prayers more." He adds, "And also read every day certain chapters of the Bible, commonly towards night." The diligence of his habit of reading the Holy Scriptures is further apparent from his always appealing to them as his sole and paramount authority, for either believing or not believing any doctrine, or adopting or not adopting any particular course of conduct. "I answered," he said, in one of his examinations before the Earl of Derby, "I believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, according as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments do teach." "I answered," he said, on another occasion, "my faith in Christ, conceived by His Holy Word, I neither could nor would deny, alter, or change, for any living creature whatsoever he were." Again, when asked by his friends to recant for the sake of his life, he says, "Again I answered that I believed and leaned only to the Scriptures, not judging things by prosperity or adversity." On another occasion, he says, "I answered, for my learning I acknowledge myself to know nothing but Jesus Christ, even Him that was crucified; and that my faith was grounded upon God's Holy Word only, and such as I doubted not pleased God, and as I would stand in at the last day, God assisting me." And again, when pressed on the subject of denying the cup to the laity, he declares, "Wherefore, if I could be persuaded in my conscience by God's Word that it were well done. I could gladly yield on this point." George Marsh had evidently read God's Word with the careful, diligent, persevering, but humble spirit of one who, to use the words of Article vi., believed that "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 the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."

Such being the case, we shall not be surprised to find the Martyr, in his letters to his various friends, exhorting them to a diligent reading of the Holy Scriptures, and making a careful use of them, as a test of the truth or falsehood of the doctrine which they heard preached. "The weapon of a Christian in this matter (he says) ought to be 'the sword of the Spirit,' which is the Word of God." And again, "Christ earnestly warneth us to beware of false' prophets who come to us in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves: by their fruits ye shall know them. The fruits of the prophets is their doctrine: in this place are we Christians taught that we should try the preachers, and others that come under colour of setting forth true religion unto us, according to the saying of St. Paul, 'Try all things, and choose that which is good:' also, the Evangelist St. John saith, 'Believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they be of God or not, for many false prophets are gone out into the world.' Therefore, if thou wilt know the true prophets from the false, try their doctrine at the true touchstone, which is the Word of God: and, as the godly Thessalonians did, search ye the Scriptures, whether those things that be preached be even so or not: for else by the outward conversation of them ye may be easily deceived." Here was recommended no withholding of the Scriptures—no reserve even in reading them. Here was no denial to the laity of the right of private interpretation—that is, of endeavouring, with God's blessing, with such ability as He had vouchsafed to them, to come at a right understanding of God's Word, and test by it the doctrines which their ministers preached to them.

George Marsh, however, did not think that the duty of Christians, as regards the Word of God, ended with diligently using and reading it themselves. Matthew x. 8—"Freely ye have received, freely give." On this principle he urged his friends to make known the Word of God to all with whom they had any conversation or influence. Now, to the extracts from the letter of the Martyr which I am about to read to you on this head, I beg your more earnest attention, because the letter is one addressed to the then inhabitants of Deane—Jenkin Crompton, James Lever, Ellis Hogg, Ralph Bradshaw, and Ellis Crompton—names all of them still familiar amongst you, some of whom are without doubt the descendants of the "well-beloved in Christ" above-mentioned, to whom the letter is addressed:—"And though all men for the most part defile themselves with the wicked traditions of men, and ordinances after the world and not after Christ, yet do ye after the example of Tobit. Daniel and his three companions, Matthias and his five sons, be at a point with yourselves, that ye will not be defiled with the unclean meats of the heathen, I mean the filthiness of idolatry and the very heathenish ceremonies of the Papists; but, as true worshippers, serve ye God in spirit and in truth according to His sacred Scriptures; which I could wish and will you above all things continually and reverently, as both St. Paul and Christ command you, to search and read, with the wholesome monitions of the same to teach, exhort, comfort, and edify one another, and your brethren and neighbours, now in time of this our miserable captivity and great starvation of souls, through want of the food of God's Word. And doubt not but that the merciful Lord, who hath promised to be with us even unto the world's end, and that wheresoever two or three be gathered together in His name He will be in the midst of them, will assist you and teach you the right meanings of the sacred Scriptures, will keep you from all errors and lead you into all truth, as He hath faithfully promised." And again—"Make provision for your households, chiefly that they may be instructed and taught in the law of God. Bring up your children in the nurture and information of the Lord, and teach them, even as the godly parents of Tobias and Susannah did their children, even from their infancy, to reverence God according to His law." So thoroughly did the Protestant Martyr feel the truth of that which is written, 1 Peter iv. 10:—"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

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Diligent as we have seen Marsh was in the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and anxious that the knowledge of them should be as far as possible spread abroad, he was, nevertheless, none the less urgent in impressing upon all with whom he had conversation, that knowledge without practice was nothing worth. "Read (he says) the parable of the sower, and among other things note and mark that the most part of the hearers of God's Word are but hypocrites, and hear the word without any fruit or profit, yea, only to their great condemnation: for only one-fourth part of the seed brings forth fruit." 'And again: "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, receive the Word of God with meekness, that is grafted in you, which is able to save your souls. And see that ye be not forgetful hearers, deceiving your own selves with sophistry, but doers of the word, whom Christ doth liken to a wise man, who buildeth his house on a rock, that when the rain descended, and the floods came and beat upon that house, and the winds blew, it fell not, because it was founded upon a rock: this is when Satan, with all his legions of devils, with all their subtle suggestions, and the world with all the mighty princes thereof, with their crafty councils, do furiously rage against us, we faint not, but abide constant in the truth, being founded upon a most sure rock, which is Christ, and the doctrine of the Gospel, against which the gates of hell, that is, the power of Satan, cannot prevail." "They only (he afterwards adds) receive the Word of God who do believe it, and also frame their lives after it, and be ready to suffer all manner of adversity for the name of the Lord, as Christ and the apostles did, and as all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must do." But it is useless to quote more of the blessed Martyr's words on this head. His own life and death, the meekness, patience, and perseverance with which he bore all the trials and resisted all the temptations to which he was exposed, the courage with which in the end, rather than give up one jot or one tittle of the Bible, he embraced a cruel death, are a stronger proof than anything which he ever said or wrote can afford, that he felt the full value of the declaration, Romans ii. 13—"For not the hearers of the law are justified before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified;" and by these "he, being dead, yet speaketh."

Last Sunday, brethren. George Marsh, the Martyr, spoke to you about prayer. This night he speaks to you about a no less important subject—the Bible. Pope Pius IV., in 1564, in the creed which is called by his name and is still considered its principal and most authoritative confession of faith by the Church of Rome, proclaimed as follows:—"The apostolic and ecclesiastical traditions, and other observances and constitutions of the Church, do I firmly admit and confess. Also the sacred Scriptures, according to that sense which our holy mother the Church hath holden and doth hold, whose office it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of Holy Scriptures, do I admit: neither will I ever receive and expound it but according to the uniform consent of the fathers." So spake Pope Pius IV. So "he being dead, yet speaketh:" speaketh, I fear, to the ruin of countless thousands to whom, on this principle, while the traditions of men are heaped upon them, not merely the right of interpreting the Bible, but even the Bible itself, is denied. A Protestant Bishop the other day advised his clergy to walk in "the broad and plain paths marked out in the inspired Word of God." "I know of no broad and plain path marked out in God's inspired Word/' was the reply of a Tractarian clergyman. Pope Pius, you see, in his creed, not only declared the Church and the fathers to be the only authorized expounders of the Bible, but put the traditions of the Church before the Bible, as to this day is done by every Roman priest. And in our Church the Tractarian tells you that the paths of God's Word are neither broad nor plain: that while they must be reserved from the many, it is only a few that are fit to tread in them, and they not by themselves, but only with the assistance of a priest, as he calls him. So speak the Pope and the Tractarian. But what "being dead, yet speaketh," the Protestant Martyr? He speaketh quite another speech. He says: The Bible is the Book, the first, the best, the Book of all books. He says: The Bible first—then, but at an immeasurable distance, the traditions of men. He says: Read the Bible, you cannot read it too much. He says: Believe nothing, except what is written in the Bible. He says: Use no reserve: it is a broad way enough for all: the paths in it are so plain that none can mistake them. He says: Not only read the Bible, but live the Bible. John xii. 48," The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day/' So,

brethren, your fellow parishioner, George Marsh, the Protestant Martyr, though dead, speaketh to you this night. So by a most significant action he spake, as he walked towards the fire which, by consuming his body, set his immortal spirit free on its flight to heaven. For we read, "So he went all the way unto his death, with his Book" that book, I doubt not, his Bible, "in his hand, looking upon the same."

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