

SERMON VI

HOLY PLACES.

"I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images."— Isaiah xlii. 8.

I HAVE usually set apart the six Sundays in Lent as a convenient opportunity for the consideration of some particular subject connected with the penitential character of the season. And since there are few things which more entirely interfere with the exercise of true penitence than the substitution of mere formalism for vital godliness, I have thought that a short but deliberate and particular survey of some of the principal features of that Romanism within the Church, which, under the various names of Puseyism, Tractarianism, and Anglo-Catholicism, is, as I have several times lately told you, a much more legitimate object of dread than Romanism from without, would not be unsuitable to the present occasion. God give you all, brethren, an abundance of grace, as He did to your forefathers in the blessed days of the Reformation: such as may enable you to separate the chaff from the wheat—that which is mere human invention from that which is really written in His Holy Word! God give you in these perilous times courage to reject the one and cling to the other!

To-day, then, it is my intention to guard you against the very prevalent, but none the less entirely false, assumption, that there is in any particular place or places anything like intrinsic holiness; and that they, therefore, demand from us the same sort of homage and respect which, in my belief, is due to God alone. This idea is one of those which is quite at the very foundation of Puseyism—one of the first steps which leads to it—one of the features which never ceases to be more and more developed through its whole course; and one of the avenues which, in the end, leads with almost unerring certainty into the bosom of Rome itself. It well deserves, therefore, to be the first to be considered.

Here we are, for instance, met together in a church. Now, the class of persons to whom I am referring would tell you that this church itself is holy. They would further add that one part of it—namely, the eastern end or chancel—is holier than the rest; and of this that which in the Prayer Book is always described as the communion table, but by them invariably called the "altar," is the holiest of all. Nor would they confine this idea to mere words. They do not by any means neglect to act upon it. We hear of prostrations upon entering the church, and bowings to the altar, which savour much more of reverence to the material building than to the Great Invisible Spirit to whom it is dedicated. We hear of none being permitted to sit in the chancel except the clergy; and of the altar being considered polluted by the intrusion of a layman within the rails, or the leaning upon it, or laying down of anything upon it by the clergyman, or as by such persons he would be called the "priest" himself.

Now, is it possible that there can really be in this building, or in any particular part of it, any intrinsic holiness such as that described above—anything which can demand the above-mentioned respect and homage? I have no hesitation in at once declaring that the whole thing is altogether out of the question. I have no hesitation in plainly saying that thus to esteem certain places holy, and thus to pay them homage and respect, is nothing more nor less than to give the glory of God to another—the very thing which, by the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah in the text, the Lord declares he will not consent to—"I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another." There is no element of God's glory so transcendent as His holiness: no single point in which He is so altogether unapproachable and incomparable. Isaiah lvii. 15 :—"For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy." And again, Exodus xv. 11:—"Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness?" And again, 1 Samuel, ii. 2:—"There is none

holy as the Lord." Real inherent holiness, such as demands homage and respect, belongs to no creature, but to the Creator alone. It is an attribute exclusively divine; and cannot be, even in the slightest degree, transferred to any other object, without establishing a rivalry which God will not for a moment brook.

Nor is it likely that the first step in this direction will end where it begins. Those who are once accustomed to transfer to the material temple, or to any part of it, the honor and respect due only to God to whose service it is dedicated, will easily pass on from this first beginning of idolatry to the same principle developed in a much more open and objectionable form. The warning contained in the last words of the text is well worthy of notice—"I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." The step from a superstitious regard for the church, the chancel, and the altar, to the introduction of a graven image, first as a means of quickening a devotional feeling towards God, but soon as an object of direct adoration, is not by any means difficult to be taken. Once taken the Tractarian becomes a Papist: the member of the Reformed Church of England, an apostate to the idolatrous Church of Rome. The idolatrous principle even in the bud is subversive of real spiritual worship; and, were there no risk of it being further developed, must on that account be stoutly contended against. But in truth we cannot, especially in these strange and perilous times, shut our eyes to the many surrounding circumstances favourable for the development of such a bud as this. And having plainly before our eyes the full blown flower in the Church of Rome, shedding around its poisonous exhalations for the destruction of unwary souls, it is still more incumbent upon all whose office it is to lead souls to look for salvation, not to the creature, but to the Creator. to nip, while they may, the evil in the bud. For one, I enter my most solemn protest against even the first steps which lead to idolatry. I protest against any superstitious regard for churches, chancels, altars. I protest even against the very fine arts themselves—architecture, painting, sculpture, music—if they be found to lead, as they often without doubt insensibly have led, those whose taste for such things has not been tempered by sound scriptural discretion, to the above-mentioned description of superstition and idolatry. It must not, however, on this account be supposed that I consider all places equal and alike. This house, for instance, in which we are now assembled was built for one especial purpose—the service of Almighty God. For that object, and for that alone, it has been by a solemn service set apart, and ever since that time exclusively used. It has been, as it is usually expressed, consecrated—a word which has doubtless given no little colour to the idea of intrinsic holiness; but which in reality, as may be seen by a reference to the consecration service, merely implies that it has been set apart from all common and profane use; and devoted exclusively to the service, and honor, and glory of God. In this sense, no one more thoroughly rejoices than myself to consider either this or any other similar building holy—a place from which at all costs must be cast out all they that sell and buy—in which the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sell doves must be overthrown—a place which must not on any account be turned into a den of thieves—a place in which there is room for no worldly work, no worldly word, no worldly thought even, but only for prayer and praise, the reading of God's Word, and preaching of Christ's Gospel—a place which, considering the majesty of the Being to whose service it is dedicated, and the solemnity and importance of the services which are performed in it, may, or rather ought to be built with every possible cost and magnificence, maintained with jealous watchfulness and care, adorned and furnished with the best we possess, be deemed in truth every thing short of holy; and regarded with all kind of respect consistent with the acknowledgment that that wherein it differs from any other building is not that it is holier, but only that it is dedicated to the services of a Holy God. I have no fear, lest while I repudiate the superstitions and dangerous notion of inherent holiness, I shall lay myself open to the charge of accounting churches common and unclean. This church at this present time, compared with what it was twenty years ago, is a proof of my feeling in this respect too plain to need any further commentary.

Brethren, there never was but one house built intrinsically holy. This has no goodly stones to boast of for its adornment. It was even refused by the builders, though it has since become the Headstone of the corner. Founded in the first instance in the manger at Bethlehem, reared afterwards amongst the citizens of Nazareth, without form or comeliness, or any beauty that we should desire; despised! rejected, and at length ignominiously destroyed, yet full of grace and truth, such is the only temple ever built intrinsically holy. That blessed temple we cannot honor too much or esteem too highly. We may bow the knee before it, and fall down in humble adoration and homage, and yet not sin against that which is written—"My glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." The more we honor this blessed temple, the more we shall please and glorify Almighty God; and the more we honor with the same sort of homage any other temple, the more will our hearts be estranged from this. The giving God's glory to another, and His praise to graven images, makes men indifferent to Jesus, even while they remain nominally Protestants, and soon leads them quite to forget Him in the bosom of Rome.

The solemn language of the text, particularly the commencing portion of it, precludes the possibility of this being considered in any other light than that of a very important subject—"I am the Lord: that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." Any thing which can, even in the most remote degree, tend to involve us in the commission of a sin by God Himself denounced as so offensive, cannot possibly be a subject of any other than paramount importance. Things which are trifling in the beginning, my dear friends, often lead in the end to very grave and serious results. I am not therefore, to be deterred from giving you an earnest and affectionate caution, with respect to such matters as these, by being told that they are too trifling to be worthy of observation. Am I desirous, especially at this solemn season of Lent, of bringing you all on your knees to Christ? Am I desirous of leading you to devote to His service all you have and all you are? Am I desirous of weaning your affections from every thing worldly, and fixing them upon a pure and spiritual worship, upon God who is a spirit, and therefore demands to be worshipped in spirit and in truth? Am I desirous of leading you to put your trust, not in gold, or silver, or precious stones, but in the blood of Christ, shed once for all, for the sins of the whole world? Brethren, you cannot for a moment doubt my anxiety to do all this. In this spirit, then, it is my duty to caution you against, even in the least and most trivial things, risking the giving the glory of God to another, or His praise to graven images. Perish architecture! Perish painting! Perish music! Perish all that is pleasing either to eye or ear, Perish the beautiful temple itself in which we are now worshipping, and in future let the blue sky be our canopy, and the green grass our kneeling place—so that God in Christ, the only holy temple, retains all your affection, all your adoration.

Deane, First Sunday in Lent, 1851