

BARING-GOULD SABINE

**THE VILLAGE PULPIT,
VOLUME II. TRINITY
TO ADVENT**

Sabine Baring-Gould
The Village Pulpit, Volume
II. Trinity to Advent

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*The Village Pulpit, Volume II. Trinity to Advent / A Complete Course of 66
Short Sermons, or Full Sermon Outlines for Each Sunday, and Some Chief
Holy Days of the Christian Year:*

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XXXVII

CHRISTIAN UNITY

Trinity Sunday.

S. Matt. xxviii. 19.

"In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

INTRODUCTION.—An ancient writer informs us that when the Egyptians named their Greatest God who was over all, they

cried thrice, "Darkness! Darkness! Darkness!" And when we come to speak of the great mystery of the Holy Trinity, the utmost we can do is to repeat their cry, and say, "Darkness! Darkness! Darkness! In the name of the Father—Darkness, and of the Son—Darkness; and of the Holy Ghost—Darkness!" for however much the mind may strive to penetrate this mystery, it can never attain to its solution. Just as the eye, looking at the sun, sees the Overpowering light as a dark ball, being dazzled by its excessive glory, so the eye of the mind perceives only darkness, when looking into the infinite splendour of God in Three Persons.

We may, indeed, see sundry likenesses here on earth, which assist us in believing the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but they are helps, and helps only; and not explanations. Thus, the sun may shine into a glass, and the glass reflect in clear water, and we see three suns, a sun in the heaven, a sun in the glass, and a sun in the water, which proceeds from both;—and this assists us to understand how the Son of God is of the Father, and the Holy Ghost is of the Father, and of the Son, and how that each is God, and yet that there are not three Gods, but one God. But, after all, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a matter of Faith, and not of Reason. We must believe, though we cannot understand.

SUBJECT.—In this Holy Trinity of Persons there is perfect unity existing, an unity of substance, an unity of Godhead, an unity of perfection, an unity of love.

And on earth, among men, there should be unity. "Be ye

perfect," said our Lord, "even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." The Father is love, the Son is love, and the Holy Ghost is the love of the Father and of the Son, and this love requires the same of us—even love, or unity.

This is what God wills on earth, our living unity, even as it exists in

Heaven between the Three Persons of the glorious Trinity.

But there are three great hindrances to Christian Unity.

I. *Selfishness*. Each man seeks his own interest, not the general interest. Let his own selfish interests be touched, and all concord is at an end. Look at two little dogs playing together, they put their paws on each other's shoulders, and dance round each other, and roll each other over, and are full of affectionate play. Throw them a bone, and it is a true bone of contention at once. All their affection is dead, and they are fighting each other for the bone. It is the same with men, they are perfectly friendly with each other so long as no little bone comes in the way—some little money matter—and then there is no end to the snarling and snapping and growling. How often it is that the dearest friends fall out about money! This has been so often noticed that it has become a common saying, "Have no money dealings with your friend." Even near relations become bitter, and are estranged, over some provision in a will. All this arises from self-seeking. Each cares for himself, and not for others.

Now look at the Holy Trinity. The Three Persons share in equal Power, Majesty, and Eternity. The Father commits all

power unto the Son, the Son gives all honour to the Father, the Son gives over to the Holy Ghost the government of His Church. The Father shares with the Son and the Holy Ghost the Divine nature, wisdom, and glory. All three are equally eternal, equally almighty, equally perfect.

II. *Pride*. Each man seeks to place himself before another. 'I am as good as another, or I am above so-and-so,' is a common thought. No man is content with what he is, he desires to thrust himself ahead of another. The whole of society is like a cabbage-stalk covered with caterpillars, and none is satisfied till it has crawled to the top. The caterpillar at the bottom bites the one above him, gets over his back, and then exults, 'There is a caterpillar nearer the bottom of the cabbage-stalk than I,' and so all the way up the stalk, those below scrambling over those above, and they at the top—at the proud elevation and unique honour of being at the head of a cabbage-stalk—tumble off, and are buried in the soil.

Was there any such pride of place in the angel host? Yes—once. The Devil wanted to be at the top, and he fell. The other angels are content where they are, and they remain angels. If they began pushing ahead of each other, cherubim wanting to be above seraphim, and angels envious of archangels, what a falling there would be from heaven! Falling stars indeed! All turning into devils. Look at the Blessed Trinity. God the Son says, "My Father is greater than I." He places Himself in the lowest rank. He calls Himself "The Son of Man"; there is no boasting, "I am

the Son of God."

III. *Obstinacy*. That is the third source of discord. Each man follows his own will, his dogged, headlong will, regardless of the wishes and advice of others.

In the Book of Judges we read that Samson caught three hundred foxes and tied them together by their tails, and put burning brands between them, where their tails were tied. What was the consequence? The wretched creatures dashed in opposite directions, each wanted to get away from the brand that scorched his tail, and so each wanted to go exactly in a different direction from the fox to which he was tied, and so the whole lot went dashing in a mad, disorderly manner among the standing corn, and destroyed a whole harvest.

That is something like a great number of people I know. They will tear off in their own direction, and drag others after them who wish to go in another direction, and the fire of discord is between them.

Look at the Blessed Trinity. Christ said, "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me."

"Let us make man," was said at the Creation. God the Father did not say "I will make man," nor God the Son "I will make man in My image," nor God the Holy Ghost "I will make man, and breathe My spirit into him," but all united in one work, and that work was very good.

CONCLUSION.—When Julian the Apostate was Emperor, three Christian soldiers were brought before him. Their names

were Emmanuel, Sabael, and Ismael. He ordered them to be examined apart, lest they should encourage one another in their faith and endurance under torture. Emmanuel, seeing his object, said, "Tyrant! we Three are one in one Trinity."

Now, listen to our Lord's prayer, "I pray not for these alone, but for those also which shall believe on Me through their word, that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee."

XXXVIII

GREAT SURPRISES

1st Sunday after Trinity.

S. Luke xvi. 23.

"In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments."

INTRODUCTION.—What a great surprise for Dives! So utterly unawaited! Dives, who had lived so comfortably, clothed in purple and fine linen, and had had such a good coat, and such excellent dinners, and such a cellar of wine, and such good friends at his dinners, goes to sleep one night after a banquet, and wakes up, and lo!—he is in hell. Surprise number one.

He feels the flames, he perceives himself surrounded by demons, his tongue is burning with thirst, and he lifts up his eyes and sees!—surprise number two!—Lazarus, the poor dirty wretch who had lain full of sores at his door. He did not know that the fellow was dead. And—surprise number three!—this wretched fellow is in Paradise.

There is another story of a great surprise in the Gospels. That is of the man who laid up for himself great possessions, and said to himself, "Soul! thou hast much goods laid up for many years,—I will pull down my barns and build greater—take thy ease, eat, drink and be merry." That night he died, and when his soul came to realise the fact that he had nothing left of all he had laid

by—that was a great surprise, and a very unpleasant one.

SUBJECT.—Let us take care that we do not have some such a great and unpleasant surprise ourselves. "Take heed," says our Lord, "to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares."

I. Now I am going to tell you a story of another great surprise. The king of Syria was engaged in war with the king of Israel, and one of the servants of the king of Syria told him that Elisha the Prophet saw and knew all that was planned by him against the king of Israel, and that he told the king of Israel, so that the Syrians were never able to catch him at a disadvantage, and defeat him. Then the king of Syria enquired where this prophet lived, and was told that he was then at Dothan.

"Therefore sent he thither horses and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night and compassed the city about." Then Elisha prayed to God to deceive and blind the eyes of the soldiers, and he went out of the gates of Dothan to them, and said, "This is not the way, neither is this the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." So he went before, and led them along the road to Samaria, the capital of the king of Israel. Then he brought them all in through the gates, and they followed, as docile as lambs, and when they were in the market-place, he said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." And the Lord opened their eyes, and lo! they were in the market-place in the midst of Samaria, and all around them were

the soldiers of their enemy, the king of Israel, with swords drawn, and in the windows were others armed with stones and javelins and molten lead to hurl down on them. Here was an unpleasant surprise!

The king of Israel and all his soldiers were eager to be at them and cut them to pieces, but Elisha was too good-hearted for that, he persuaded the king to be generous, to give them their breakfast and send them home. So "He prepared great provisions for them; and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master." They were lucky to be let off so easily, and they owed their lives to there being a Saint of God there to intercede for them. But you may be assured to their dying day they carried with them a lively recollection of the very unpleasant surprise it was to them when their eyes were opened, and they found themselves in the midst of their enemies, when they fondly supposed themselves in the humble and undefended little town of Dothan.

II. Now for you!—Whither are you going? Whither are you being led? Are you at all aware? I very much fear that a great many of you are as blind and as ignorant of the road you are treading as were those soldiers of the king of Syria. You are going on headlong, chattering with one another, laughing and singing, in open order, very little discipline, and perfectly confident that you will come to no harm. Take care! Some day your eyes will be opened, and you will experience an unpleasant surprise. Then, when your eyes are opened you will see yourselves surrounded

by the enemies of your souls, ready to drag you to destruction, and no help near. Very unexpected was this case of the Syrians, that the prophet prayed for them, and that instead of being put to death they were fed and sent away in peace. That is not what you must expect. Dives, when his eyes were opened, cried to Abraham, but got no help, no, not even a drop of water to cool his tongue.

III. No man need go blindly to destruction, for God has given him guidance, and power of seeing whither he goes. The prophet led these soldiers of Syria into the midst of their enemies, but God's good Spirit, which is our guide, will lead us into the Land of Righteousness if we will listen to His voice, and go where he points the way.

We have no right to plead blindness and ignorance, if hereafter we find that we have gone astray, and our eyes are opened when we are in the midst of our enemies, for blindness can not come upon us unless we wilfully shut our eyes to the light, and with the teaching of Christ and His Church ever sounding in our ears, we have no right to plead ignorance.

Moreover, God is so merciful, that He never allows any to go to destruction unwarned of their danger. As He sent His angel to stand in the way of Balaam, so will He send some check, and throw some obstacle in the road you are treading, to bring you to your senses in time, and will not allow you to perish, unless you wilfully and deliberately persist in the road of evil, knowing the consequences, and knowing whither you are going.

CONCLUSION.—Lastly. It was a great surprise to Lazarus when he found himself in Paradise. He had no doubt hoped and prayed to be admitted there, but when he found himself there, he was amazed to see how far its happiness and its peace surpassed his expectations. So with those of us who are found meet to enter Heaven. However great our anticipations, they will be surpassed. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, to conceive those good things which God hath prepared for those who love Him.

May He bring us all to that glad surprise.

XXXIX

THE HOLY COMMUNION

2nd Sunday after Trinity.

S. Luke xiv. 16.

"A certain man made a great supper."

INTRODUCTION.—When the fulness of time was come, God the Eternal Father said: "In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin, I have no pleasure." Then said the Son, "Lo, I come." He came that He might take away the valueless sacrifice, and establish the one full and perfect propitiation for the sins of the world. And indeed it was time. All creation was groaning and travailing in pain, and waiting for redemption, then said He—"Lo, I come." The souls of the faithful were in Hades, prophets, patriarchs, and kings, desirous to see His Day, prisoners of Hope, desirous to be released by His Blood of the Covenant,—then said He—"Lo, I come."

Men wandered in darkness, desiring light, the whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint, and in their error, darkly, and in their sickness, faintly, they sought the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him; then said He—"Lo, I come."

They knew not the way of God how they might walk, and they needed a guide; then said He—"Lo, I come."

They were sunk in sin, and found that the old bloody sacrifices

and burnt offerings could not take away guilt, they needed a more perfect sacrifice; then said He—"Lo, I come." They knew not what the nature of God was, and they formed to themselves gods, in the likeness of men. How should they know without a teacher? Then said He—"Lo, I come."

Nor is this all. At this day, still His answer is, promptly, when He is needed—"Lo, I come."

Does any father desire his dear little one to be taken into the arms of

Christ and blessed, still His answer is—"Lo, I come."

Does any man need direction, guidance, help in the way of life? He says, "Lo, I come; I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Does any desire sustaining food by the way? He says—"Lo, I come, and the Bread I give is My flesh, which I give for the life of the world."

Is any burdened with the weight of sin, and desires pardon and reconciliation, He says—"Lo, I come, though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as wool."

Is any in sorrow, and heart sore? He says, "Lo, I come to bind up the broken-hearted."

Is any dying?—He is still ready with His answer, "Lo, I come, when thou goest through the waters I am with thee."

You see how striking is the readiness of Our Blessed Lord. Now look at to-day's Gospel, and see how this is met by man. Christ is represented as having made a great supper, the Holy

Eucharist, and to that he invites all Christians, and He sends forth His messengers to bid them come, then they all with one consent begin to make excuse. The messengers go to the man who has bought oxen, and invite him to the supper of his lord, and his answer is, "I pray thee, have me excused." They go to a man who has bought a farm, and his answer is, "I pray thee, have me excused." They go to a man who has married a wife, and his answer is, "I cannot come."

"Lo, I come!" says Christ. "I cannot come," says man. "Lo, I come to man," says Christ. "I cannot come to Christ," says man.

I. It was the rule among the early Christians to communicate every Lord's Day. The rule of the Church, as laid down in the service-books, then ordered that all those who were open and scandalous livers, all those who had committed some deadly sin, and had not been reconciled to God, should leave church before the Consecration, after the reading of the Gospel. Now suppose some good old bishop of that day were to rise from the dead, and come into this church, what would he see?—Directly the sermon is over,—a rush of almost all in the church, men, women, and children, running out of the door, and only three or four, or at most a dozen, remaining to partake of the Lord's Body. That is what he would see. Now, what would he say?—He would lift up his hands in horror, and say, "What is this? All these notorious sinners! All these open profligates! All these burdened with mortal sin, cutting them off from the grace of God! Take me back to my grave, I do not want to see any more of such

horrible days."

But if I happened to be present, I would say to him. "You are jumping to conclusions too rashly. Times are altered. It is not the criminals and profligates who go out of church before the Consecration of the Blessed Sacrament, and are unworthy to eat of the Lord's Body, it is those who cannot make up their minds to do exactly what the Lord commanded; it is those who are half-hearted, who wish to serve God, but do not want to serve Him very much." Then, I doubt not, the old bishop would turn upon me with a wrathful face, and say, "Let me go back to my grave! This is worse! A thousand times worse! The whole Christian world has grown cold of heart, and dead of faith, if all with one consent begin to make excuse, and say, 'I cannot come.' I had rather they were either hot or cold, but because they are neither hot nor cold—away! I cannot bear to look at their faces! Let me go back to my grave."

III. I know what is passing in your minds as well as if you had got glass skulls. And this is what I see that not a few of you are thinking. "Ha! there is the Parson at it again! always hammering away at Communion. Can he not leave us alone? Let him talk to us of other matters; let him preach to us some real stinging gospel truth, and make us wince. Anything but this eternal preaching about coming to Communion." Now I will tell you why I preach about this, and hammer, hammer, at it. Because it is good stinging gospel truth, and the grumbling that is going on is because your consciences really are wincing at what I say.

Listen:—other folks talked like you in olden times. When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, God in mercy sent them Bread from Heaven, the manna, to feed them on their way through the wilderness. What said the people in return for the blessing? Were they very grateful? Were they very eager to gather up the Angels' food? By no means, they sat grumbling in their tents and said, "Our soul is dried away; there is nothing beside this manna before our eyes." Put into modern language that is, "Our souls have dried up for want of preaching of free justification, and no good at all in keeping the law; we don't want any of your Sacramental teaching, no Communion for us, we can do very well without that, our soul abhorreth this light food, as for this Holy Communion, there is nothing but that preached to us, year in, year out."

Well! If this Sacramental teaching be not God's own blessed Gospel, there is no meaning in words. Listen to this! I never said anything so strong, and this is what Christ Himself spake:—"I am the Bread of Life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. I am the living bread which came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I give for the life of the world." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed."

Now—mark you. When Jesus said this, many of His disciples said, "This is a hard saying"—and, from that time they went back, and walked no more with Him. It is so still, it will be so always. Just as many of the old Israelites loathed the manna and said, "Our souls are dried away; there is nothing but this manna before our eyes," so there always will be faithless disciples who when they hear the invitation to partake of the Body of Christ, the true Manna, will say, "This is a hard saying," and will thenceforth no more walk with Him.

XL

RECEIVING AND REJECTING

3rd Sunday after Trinity.

S. Luke, xv. 2.

"This Man receiveth sinners."

INTRODUCTION.—In to-day's Gospel our Lord represents Himself as a Good Shepherd seeking His lost sheep, going out into the wilderness after them, to bring them back into the fold.

The fold is that place where He keeps His flock shut behind the hurdles of the Ten Commandments. Every now and then a sheep leaps one of these hurdles, or pushes his way between them, and runs away into forbidden pastures. Then the Good Shepherd goes after the erring sheep, and brings it back. "And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost."

SUBJECT.—Christ is not always to be regarded as the Saviour receiving sinners. The time will come when He will be the Judge, rejecting them. He is a shepherd now, bringing back the straying sheep, and replacing them in the fold, but one day He will do just the contrary, He will go to His fold, and pick out the incorrigibly bad sheep, and cast them out.

I. We will consider Him now as the Good Shepherd. What

is His purpose in bringing back the straying sheep? That they may remain within bounds for the future. Christ has come to save sinners, that is to say, He brings them to repentance, and pardons their transgressions, in order that, for the future, they may walk in newness of life, and not commit the sins of which they were guilty before. Thus if He brings back one who has been a liar, it is to truth that he returns, and Christ expects him to speak the truth ever after. If He brings back a drunkard, it is to temperance, and He expects him to be sober for the future. If He brings back one who has sinned through impurity, it is to chastity and modesty. This is what S. Paul means when he says, "Put off concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour. Let him that stole steal no more, let no corrupt conversation proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another."

II. We will consider Christ as the Judge. The time will come when He will separate the bad from the good, when He will go over His fold, and pick out all those diseased sheep which are good for nothing, and which taint and infect the others, and will cast them outside.

That is to say, the time will come, when Christ will no more

call sinners to Him, and bring them to His Church, but will examine those who are in His Church, and unless they have mended their ways, unless they have become better for being there, He will throw them out, and have nothing further to do with them.

When Joshua was leading the people of God into the Promised Land, God said to Joshua, "Up! Sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow."

In what did this sanctification consist? "Joshua rose early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: and he brought the family of Judah; and took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: and he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi was taken." Then Joshua learned how this man had sinned and incurred the anger of God, and he and all Israel carried him and his family outside the camp unto the valley of Achor, "and all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones." That was the sanctification of Israel,—the putting away the black sheep out of the flock.

When Jesus sat with His Twelve in the supper chamber, at the Last Supper, Judas rose and went out, and when he was gone forth, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." A little while before, while Judas was in the room, we are told, "Jesus was troubled in spirit." But the moment the evil one among the Apostles was cast forth, the glorification

of the Son of Man began.

So it is now, and so will it be hereafter.

Now, as long as there is evil in the Church, as long as there are sinners who will not amend, as long as there are tares growing up with the wheat,—so long "Jesus is troubled in spirit." But when the great Day comes, when our true Joshua will lead the people of God into the Promised Land, then He will sanctify His people by casting out from among them the Achans; then from the company of His Elect the Judases will be banished, and the Son of Man will be glorified indeed.

CONCLUSION.—Therefore, my Brethren, be careful to amend. You may have been strayed sheep who have been mercifully brought back to the fold, if so, amend your ways, and grow in holiness and in spiritual health; or in the Last Day you will be thrust forth as incurable, and the Children of God will be sanctified, whilst you are buried in the valley of Achor.

XLI

RASH DECISIONS

4th Sunday after Trinity.

S. Luke vi. 37.

"Judge not—condemn not—forgive."

INTRODUCTION.—Our Lord here condemns all rash judgments. We know not the motives of other men's actions, and therefore have no right to pass a sweeping condemnation upon them. From our ignorance, we ought to be cautious and merciful in our judgments, and from our own weakness, we should be forgiving to those who have trespassed against us.

Rash judgments arise from pride. It is because we are puffed up with a high opinion of our own selves, our own goodness, the soundness of our judgment, the sharpness of our perception, that we are so prompt to pass judgment on others.

SUBJECT.—This same Pride urges us to something else, Persistency in maintaining that on which we have determined, even after we know it is unwise. It is of this which I am going to speak to-day. This fault is so closely akin to rash judgment of others, that I may well address you on the subject upon a Sunday when our Lord warns against the other.

I. Many a man, out of pride, sticks to what he says after he knows that it is wrong. He will not admit that he is wrong, or he

is moved by a false sense of what is due to himself to hold to his word, or to his opinion, when his conscience tells him that he is in error. You must have met with those stubborn persons who are not to be moved by any argument, not to be convinced by any proof, that they are wrong. They have made up their minds once for all, and are no longer open to reverse their decision.

Let us look to Scripture, and see if we have any examples of such. I find two; and one of these is in a man of whom we might have hoped better things—King David.

I. When David came to the kingdom, he was very anxious to show kindness to any son of Jonathan whom he might find; and he heard of Mephibosheth, who was lame in both his feet, and at once made over to him all the landed property that had belonged to King Saul, his grandfather. After seven years, Absalom, David's son, conspired against his father, and David was obliged to fly from Jerusalem, with a few friends. As David was escaping, there came to him Ziba, a servant of Mephibosheth, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and a hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a skin of wine. Then David asked Ziba what these were for, and Ziba answered that he had brought them to the king as a present, thinking he might need them in his flight. And the king asked after Mephibosheth; then Ziba said, "O! he is at home in Jerusalem, he said in my hearing, A good time is coming to me. To-day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father." Now all this was a wicked

lie. Mephibosheth had sent the present, and Ziba had promised to tell David why his master could not come with him, because he was crippled in both his feet, and could not get about. As for any idea of recovering the throne of Saul, it had not once entered his head. Now when David heard the slander of Ziba, he was very angry with Mephibosheth, and at once he judged him, and condemned him, without waiting to hear more, and said to Ziba, "Behold, I will give thee all that belonged to Mephibosheth, if ever I get back to Jerusalem and recover my power."

Not long after there was a great battle, and Absalom was slain, and the enemies of David put to flight. Then David returned over Jordan from the wilderness where he had taken refuge, and Mephibosheth met him. This good man, full of love for David, "had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes," all the time of David's absence, to shew his great grief. David at once reproached him for his disloyalty, and then only he heard how great a lie Ziba had told. Then David answered, "Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land." Mark the wicked injustice. The lying, slanderous servant is rewarded with half the property of poor Mephibosheth,—why?—because David had promised him the whole when misinformed. David knows that Ziba has acted falsely, yet, because he had said to him that he should be given the land of his master, he keeps his word to him, though he knows he is doing an injustice to Mephibosheth.

There you have a pretty example of an obstinate man sticking

to what he has said, after he is convinced that he has been misled, and doing a great wrong rather than acknowledge that he had judged rashly, and condemned on no good grounds.

II. I can give you another example. King Herod was pleased with the dancing of the daughter of Herodias one evening at a supper, and he swore to her, when he was half tipsy, that he would give her what she liked in reward for her display. Then she asked him to cut off the head of S. John the Baptist, and give it her in a dish. Now, as soon as she asked this, the king was sorry, for he knew that S. John was a good man, and he knew also that he had no right to have a man murdered in prison to please the whim of a wicked woman; however, because he had passed his word, he was too proud and cowardly to go back from it, and refuse her what she had no right to ask. Then he sent an executioner, and he cut off the head of the saint, and put it in a dish, and it was brought thus to the girl, and she carried it to her mother.

III. A man is right to stick to his word, if his word be right. He is right to stick to his promise, if he have promised that over which he has a just right. He is right to stick to his opinion if his opinion be founded on good grounds, and if he have heard nothing that ought to cause him to alter it.

But—no man has any right to stick to his opinion simply because it is his opinion. He has no right to hold a promise which he had no right to make. He has no right to adhere to a harsh judgment simply because he has formed that judgment.

When our Lord bids us not judge, He bids us be very cautious

in forming a decided opinion, and in sticking to it through thick and thin. We know so little here, and so imperfectly, that our opinions must be formed on uncertain grounds, and therefore we have no right to be tenacious about them. Yet many persons are as touchy about their opinions as though it were a sacrilege to dispute them. Some of the greatest injustices have been done through obstinacy, in clinging to opinions that have become untenable.

CONCLUSION.—Remember then the lessons taught you by our Lord in this day's Gospel, and also by the conduct of David. Be very cautious of forming a judgment, and when you have formed one, do not allow Pride to stand in the way of confessing your fault, and changing your opinion, when you are given reasonable grounds for so doing.

XLII

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

5th Sunday after Trinity

S. Luke v. 5.

"We have taken nothing; nevertheless at Thy word, I will let down the net."

INTRODUCTION.—S. Peter and the other Apostles had been fishing all night, and had met with no success at all, then Jesus entered into the boat of Simon, and bade him launch out and let down his net. S. Peter did not hesitate. He had met with no success when fishing in the night, nevertheless now, at the word of Christ, he fishes again, and this time the net encloses a great multitude, so that the net breaks. No doubt our Lord desired to show those who were to become fishers of men that there were two ways of doing a thing, and that one way would be successful and the other would not.

If they were going to become fishers of men, they must try to catch them by carrying Christ, *i.e.* a Christlike spirit, with them, and the spirit of Christ is love and gentleness. If they were to be successful in winning souls, they must have a loving zeal, and that would gain more than hard work without love.

SUBJECT.—We are all of us, in our several callings, fishers of souls. Of course, especially are the clergy fishers, but not they

only, every man who loves God must seek to win souls for God, every man who is in the net of the Church must seek to draw others into the same net. If the fisher is to be successful, he must fish in the spirit of Christ, that is, actuated by love, and must deal gently with the souls he desires to gain.

I. I say, we are all fishers. Those of us who are parents desire to draw to Christ the souls of our children, those who are masters, the souls of their servants. The husband seeks to win the wife, and the believing wife the husband. "What knowest thou, O wife," says S. Paul, "whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

The servant seeks to win the fellow-servant, the labourer in the field has the welfare of his fellow-labourer at heart, and seeks to draw him to God. It was Cain who said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" And the same isolating, selfish spirit is in those who take no interest in those they associate with, and do not seek their good.

I was much struck last spring with something a gentleman said to me, who had been a good deal in America; he was much surprised and struck with the interest felt in England by the rich for the poor, by the master and mistress for their servants, by the landowner for his tenants, and he said to me, "This seems to me the most marvellous thing I have seen in England. With us a master cares not one snap of the fingers what becomes of the man he employs, he no more thinks of what becomes of him than he does of a dollar that passes through his hands. He sees that

he does his work, and if the man dies, the master gets another in his place to-morrow, and asks nothing about the man who has disappeared."

Well! I thank God we are not come to that yet, however advanced we may be in our independent ways; and it is not right and Christian that we should.

II. Now we come to the way in which we are to try to draw other souls to Christ, the souls of our children, of our servants, of our companions, of our fellow-workers. The first principle of success is gentleness.

In the 4th chapter of the 2nd book of Kings we have this story. There was a Shunammite woman who had an only son. She was a good kind-hearted woman, who had shown much hospitality to the prophet Elijah [Transcriber's note: Elisha?]. One day the little boy ran out into the harvest field, when the sun was hot, and he had a sunstroke, and was very ill. "He said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then he died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out." Then she ordered one of the servants to saddle an ass, and drive her to the prophet; and when she found him, she told him the piteous story, and how the poor little fellow whom she loved so dearly, and who was such a darling of his father, and such a pet of the old Elisha when he paid them his visits, was lying white and dead upstairs on the bed.

Then Elisha was sorely troubled, and he gave his staff to his servant, Gehazi, and made him run as fast as he could to the house of the Shunammite. "Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again; and lay my staff upon the face of the child." Gehazi obeyed, but it was of no use. "He laid the staff upon the face of the child: but there was neither voice, nor hearing." Then Elisha came himself, and he shut the door, and laid himself beside the little body, and put his lips to the lips of the child, and his warm loving heart against the little dead heart, and took the chill hands in his. Then the spirit of the child came back into him again, and he sat up, and Elisha delivered him alive to his mother.

Now this story contains some lesson for us. And this is the short comment on the miracle by an old writer, "Him whom the rod of terror will not rouse, *love* will." Or in other words, we may learn by this that gentleness will succeed where harshness will fail.

In the time when all the north of England was heathen, there was an assembly held at Iona to decide who should preach the gospel to the English of Northumbria. Then one missionary was sent, and after having laboured for some years, he came back to give an account of his mission. And a council was held, and he said, "Those Northumbrians are a stiff-necked, hard-hearted people. I threatened them with God's wrath, I spoke to them of Hell-fire, I warned them of the terrors of judgment, I

denounced the vengeance of God on them, and they would not be converted." Then one sitting in a bark seat said, "My brother, it seems to me that you went the wrong way to work. You should have gone in love, and not in wrath. You should have tried to win, and not to drive." All eyes were turned en the speaker, and it was decided with one voice that he should be sent, and he went. His name was Aidan—and he was the Apostle of all Northumberland, Durham, and Yorkshire. He had the joy to see the whole people bow their necks to receive the yoke of Christ.

What says S. Paul? "What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?" If he had come with the rod, he would have gone back disappointed.

CONCLUSION.—Let us then, dear brethren, in dealing with the souls of others, approach them, not with the rod, or we shall fail to awake them to a new and better life, but in love, and in the spirit of gentleness, and then we shall meet, I doubt not, with good success.

XLIII

PERSISTENCY IN WRONG DOING

6th Sunday after Trinity.

S. Matt. v. 25.

"Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him."

INTRODUCTION.—I spoke to you the Sunday before last about the obstinacy of persisting in an opinion after you have good cause to believe that this opinion is unjust, or unreasonable. I am going to speak to you to-day of another form of obstinacy.

SUBJECT.—My subject is Persistency in doing wrong, because you have begun wrong. This is only another form of the same fault. The other is thinking wrong persistently, this is perseverance in doing wrong. And the source of both is the same, Pride. Pride stands in the way of altering an erroneous opinion, and in the way of altering a wrongful course of action.

I. In the tenth chapter of the second book of Samuel we have a striking story of the way in which a man having once done a wrong, persists in it, and it brings about his ruin.

King David, when firmly established on his throne, began to look about him to see who had been kind to him in his day of adversity, and to reward, or thank them. He showed his gratitude to the memory of his friend Jonathan by investing

his son Mephibosheth with his grandfather's property. Then he remembered that Nahash the King of Ammon had shown him hospitality, and he heard also that he was just dead. So David said, "I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me." And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father.

The message was kindly intended. David wished to show that he was not forgetful of past favours, that he was ready to make a lasting friendship with Hanun, and he desired to exhibit his sympathy with the son for the loss of his father. These were the three motives actuating David, all good. Now, how did Hanun act? One would naturally suppose that he would appreciate these motives, and that he would be glad, when scarce settled on his throne, to secure the powerful friendship of King David. No!—he was young, insolent, inconsiderate, and fond of practical joking,—a vulgar-minded fellow, puffed up with conceit at his elevation to power. Hanun took the servants, the ambassadors of David, and shaved off half their beards, and cut off the lower half of all their clothes, and sent them back to David. And when it was told unto David that his messengers had been thus ignominiously treated, "he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed, and said, Tarry at Jericho, until your beards be grown, and then return." As soon as Hanun and his Ammonites had done this, what was their next step?—As perhaps you are aware, by the laws of civilized and uncivilized people, the persons of ambassadors are held to be sacred. Therefore Hanun had not

only done an insolent, and utterly blackguard trick, but he had gone against one of the first laws of nations. What he ought to have done, was at once to send to David a most humble apology, with an acknowledgment that he had acted wrongly. But he was too proud for this. He would not admit that he had erred. He at once sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand foot soldiers, and of King Maacah a thousand men, and of Ish-tob twelve thousand men, so that this malicious trick began to shew that it was an expensive one. Then David's army drew up in array against this army of Ammon and their hired allies, and at once, all the mercenaries ran away. So then there was nothing for it but for the Ammonites to return as quickly as possible within the walls of their city. Now, what should Hanun have done? It was clear that David was not eager to punish him, for he had not even sent his army against Ammon till Hanun had collected the great host against him, and as soon as the Ammonites, deserted by their auxiliaries, had retired within their walls, the army of David had not pressed them, but gone quietly back to Jerusalem. What then ought Hanun to have done? Of course, he should now have sent his apology, and said how wrongly he had acted, how ashamed of himself he was, and how desirous he was to have the past forgotten. But no, having done wrong once, his pride would not let him acknowledge it, and he went on. He now engaged Hadarezar, King of the Syrians, and this time there was a great battle, and David slew of the Syrians seven hundred chariots, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote

the captain of their host, so that he was left dead on the field, and all the Syrians who could escape ran away for their lives. Then Hadarezer had had quite enough of fighting against Israel, and he made peace with David, and "So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more." Now the Ammonites were left completely without auxiliaries. What chance was there for them? Still David did not press them. A whole year passed, and he made no move. He was waiting for an apology. But no. That headstrong Hanun was still too proud to make it. He would die with all his people rather than say he had done wrong. So, at the end of a year, David sent his army against the Ammonites, and destroyed them utterly. He killed Hanun, and took away his crown, and plundered his capital town, and ruined all his cities. That was the end of one practical joke unapologised for.

II. In the Gospel for to-day, our Lord warns against the same hard-headedness in persisting in refusing an apology, and to make up friendship that has been broken. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." He urges Christians when they have done an injury to any, frankly to confess it, to put their pride in their pocket, and to ask forgiveness. It is not an easy thing to do, to acknowledge that you have done wrong, but there is more true courage in doing so, than in persevering in

spite of the consequences, in wrong doing. Many a lasting and miserable quarrel has arisen because at the outset one little word has not been said, which would have made all things smooth. Two families become estranged and bitterly hostile, because some one has reported to the mother in one, that the mother in the other had made a disparaging remark about her. A little word, and all would be explained, and set to rights. "Let not the sun go down on your wrath," says the Apostle, and an excellent piece of advice this is:—Make up all quarrels the same day that they break out.

There was a good old bishop of Alexandria called John the Almsgiver, and he and the Governor of the city were great friends. Something occurred which made a breach between them. If I remember aright, it was this. The bishop was very charitable, and was always urging the rich people to give to the poor, and they were constantly sending him money to distribute among the sick and needy. Now at this time the Governor had experienced some difficulty in raising the taxes, and this ruffled his temper. He was on a visit to the Bishop, when he saw on the stairs a number of servants of a rich lady bringing up, as a present to the bishop some pots, labelled "Virgin Honey." The Governor said he did not believe they were pots of honey, but pots of gold, and when the bishop offered to open them and let him see for himself, he dashed out of the door in a rage, and said, "No wonder I can't get money in taxes when you swindle it out of the people, to feed the beggars on honey." When the Governor was gone, the old Bishop was very troubled, and he sat in his

room all the rest of the day, waiting for the Governor to come and make it up with him. But no! the Governor was fuming with anger and would do no such thing. That evening the Governor had a party, and as he was sitting at table with the guests, a little scrap of paper was put on his plate, a servant of the Bishop had brought it. The Governor took it up and saw, "Dear old Friend—**THE SUN IS SETTING.**" Then his heart relented, he excused himself to his guests, and ran to the house of the Bishop, and they fell into one another's arms and made friends again.

CONCLUSION.—Now remember this story. Whenever you have a quarrel with another, let not the sun go down on your wrath. Make it up before set of sun.

XLIV

THE MEASURE OF SIN

7th Sunday after Trinity.

S. Mark viii. 2.

"I have compassion on the multitude."

INTRODUCTION.—In to-day's Gospel we see the tender compassion of our Lord for those who came into the wilderness to hear Him. This is only one example out of many of His great love and mercy: and indeed "His mercy is over all His works." "Thou, O Lord," says David, "art full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering and truth." This is a verity of which we are so convinced that it is quite possible we may overlook the other truth, that His mercy, though unlimited in extent, is limited in its application. His mercy is extended for a definite purpose, and when it ceases to avail for this purpose, then it ceases to flow. What that purpose is, S. Paul tells us. "Knowest thou not," he says, "that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." That is, God is merciful that we may amend, not in order that we may continue in sin. Now, if men thought that when they had fallen into grievous sin there was no more a hope of recovery, then they would sink into despair, and become hard and impenitent. But that this may not be the case, God assures us of His mercy, but he assures us of His mercy only to insure our amendment.

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