

FIVE-MINUTE SERMONS.

Third Sunday of Advent.

PENANCE.

For now, the axe is laid to the root of the tree. (Matt. III. 10.)

St. John Baptist, my brethren, as you know, retired to the desert at an early age, and led there an austere and solitary life, eating coarse and unpalatable food, abstaining from wine and strong drink, cutting off all unnecessary enjoyments of the senses, and giving himself up to prayer and meditation.

Therefore, though it was not necessary for St. John, sanctified as he was even before his birth, to cut off all other sources of pleasure in order to fill his soul with the joy that comes from the love of God, and though he had no sins to atone for, for his life had been free from blame, still he took up this course of penance in order to show forth even more plainly than by his words the need that his hearers would have, in their measure, to do likewise, if they were to share in the redemption to come.

For now, as he told them, the axe was to be laid to the root of the tree. God's chosen people, the Jews, whom He had specially watched over for so many years, whom He had often chastised and corrected, and had brought back to His favor when they profited by His visitations, they were no more to be thus dealt with. The tree which had sprung from the seed of Abraham was not to be allowed any longer to stand with merely some lopping and pruning; no, now, if it still would not bring forth the good fruit of a thorough and genuine penance, it was to be cut down and cast into the fire. It was the supreme test which was approaching; if the people whom He had chosen would stand it, they should still retain their place; otherwise they should be rejected as a nation, and only those among them who would truly turn to their God should be saved.

My brethren, St. John is still preaching this doctrine of penance to us. The Church of the New Law is not on her trial, as was that of the Old; no, her Divine Founder has promised that she shall endure to the end of the world. But we, each one of us, have to take the words of his precursor to ourselves. We are called by the name of Christ; yes, but that will not save us. St. John said to the Jews: "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for our father." So we are not to think ourselves as belonging to Christ, unless we have cast out from our hearts and souls what puts a fatal obstacle to His entrance into them. His axe will be laid to our root also, unless we on our part lay the axe to the root of our sins.

What is this root of sin in us? It is just this desire of sensual indulgence against which St. John in his life as well as in his doctrine came to make the strongest of protests. If we wish not to bring forth the fruits of sin, we must lay the axe to its root. We must practice penance and mortification, not indeed always to the degree in which he practised it, but at least so far as it is necessary that we may keep the law of God. We must not dally with those things which are dangerous to us, innocent though they may be to others. Our Lord has told us that if even our eyes and hands themselves are an occasion of sin we must pluck them out or cut them off; if, then, there is anything we enjoy, but can really do without, we must not make a pretext of the good use which we might make of it if it really is plain that we will abuse it, but must resolutely cast it away. If we would avoid the bitter fruit which will naturally grow we must lay the axe to the root of the tree.

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Minardo's Liniment is used by Physicians.

How They Worked Their Way.

By MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN, LL. D.

IV.—CONTINUED.

"Thank you. This is a letter from Byrnes & Stoughton, lawyers, in New York—both old friends of mine—offering to take you into their office, if I will send you there. Do you want to go?" Dermot's face flushed with pleasure. "Oh, father!" he said. This was the realization of his dream. "Of course," continued Mr. Beresford, "this would have been impossible if Dick were not here to take your place. But, as Dick don't want to leave us—"

"Oh, no!" cried Dick, with a look of bright affection towards Mr. Beresford. "And as he seems to take to farm life more than you do—"

"Oh, yes!" cried Dick. "I shall promise Byrnes & Stoughton that you shall go to them."

"But," said Dermot, timidly, "you will have to pay my board, father?"

"Partly," answered Mr. Beresford. "Byrnes & Stoughton will pay you a small sum—equal to about half your expenses—and I shall be able to pay the rest, I hope."

Dermot went over to his father, buried his face in the bedclothes, and cried. It was such a great kindness! And to know that his father was, in spite of his illness, thinking so much of him! He knew that that dear father would get well. He must get well.

The rest of the family were saddened by the news. I seemed like a great break in the happy circle of which Dermot was the only discontented member. Dermot saw the gloom of the family. "I had a fight to-day," he said, his spirits rising, "with that bully, Jim Windsor. He was driving along the road on a big load of wood. One of his horses lost a shoe going down the hill, and he called out to me, 'Bring me that shoe, will you, young fellow?' I would have done it for anyone else, but I wouldn't for Jim Windsor, so I said, get down and pick it up yourself. I saw that he couldn't, for it was as much as he could do to hold his horses going downhill. He called me names and shook his whip at me. I remembered who he was and paid no attention to him."

"That was wrong," Mr. Beresford said. "Windsor's a bully, because he does not know any better. You ought to have taught him something, by returning good for evil."

Dermot looked uneasy. Then he said—"You did that with Job Fitts and it didn't come to any good."

"It was right, it was Christian to do as we did. One must be kind, whether it 'pays' in the sense of bringing gratitude to us or not. I know very well that one must keep up one's self-respect, and resist encroachments on one's rights; but there is a way of doing that, without being churlish or un-Christian. You saw that Jim Windsor was in 'a tight place'—as Brian says—but you would not help him out."

"I knew how tight the place was—that's the reason I did not help him out. He couldn't get down from his wagon to get the shoe, you see, because he had had enough work to keep his horses from sliding downhill."

"I am ashamed of you, Dermot." Dermot turned uneasily in his chair. "I hate the whole crowd of them!" he cried. "They go to their churches and listen to their ministers, often ignorant people, abusing the Pope and Catholics, and think they are Christians because they hate the Church!"

Mr. Beresford smiled. "And you, my dear boy, say every morning and night, 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us,' but you go on hating these people. For myself, Dermot, I think that you, who are not ignorant, who have had all the great privileges of the Church, will have more to answer for, than these poor people who sneer at Catholics, not knowing what they do."

Dermot hung his head, but said—"I shall be glad to be away from them."

"Besides," continued his father, "let us look at things in a practical way. To have friends one must be friendly. The world looks on us with the eyes we look on it. We might be Mormons, but, provided we are 'neighborly,' these people would grow friendly to us. There is nothing that overcomes the prejudices of Americans so easily, as good actions and good example in the every-day transactions of life."

"Listen!" said Kathleen, suddenly. "Cats!" cried Brian.

There was a sound at the door. Dick opened it and looked out. He heard nothing but the wind among the trees. There was an interval of silence. Then another sound, as of a slight knock at the door. Dermot went this time. Still, nobody was in sight. He thought he saw a head visible among the lilac bushes, at the side of the house; he made a bound forward, and returned dragging Job Fitts.

"What do you mean, you young rascal!" he exclaimed.

"I thought your father would have come," he said. "I want to see him."

"Well, come in and don't be dodging around like a wild beast."

Job entered the warm, cheerful sitting-room. Mr. Beresford held out his hand, kindly. But Job seemed too astonished by the change in him, to speak. He walked awkwardly up to Mr. Beresford's bedside, and shook hands.

"Did you want to see me, Job?"

"Yes," said Job. "But I can't say what I want to say, because I promised I wouldn't open my lips about it. I'll be obliged if you'll let me have a pencil and a sheet of paper."

Mary brought them. Job laboriously wrote some words on the paper, folded it, gave it to Mr. Beresford and darted from the room. They heard the front door slam after him.

Mr. Beresford opened the paper and read—"I take my pen in hand to let you know that Jim Windsor and his gang will burn your barn to-night."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Beresford. "Not nonsense, at all," said her husband, "after Dermot's treatment of Windsor, it is probable he will take some revenge."

"He can't be so bad as that," said Mrs. Beresford. "Well, what's to be done?" asked Brian.

"We shall have to stay up and guard."

"Certainly, Dermot," said Dick. Mr. Beresford sighed. He was not anxious to trust the defense of his barn to these three. But he was helpless. He turned to Dick.

"Dick," he said, "as the oldest and wisest, I rely on you."

"Very well, sir." The barn was not insured. Should it be burnt, the family would suffer grievous loss.

Dick went out at once and fitted a long hose to the iron pump. Dermot and Brian examined the fastenings of the barn. Then they gathered a pile of big stones and put them in a dark corner, ready to be used against the intruders.

"I don't think they'll try such a mean thing," said Brian. "I imagine Job Fitts was frightened into believing it."

Dick shook his head. "We'd better prepare for the worst." The only weapons in the house were Mr. Beresford's old-fashioned pistol, and Dermot's gun. It was decided that Dick, in virtue of his age and discretion, should have the pistol.

Mrs. Beresford and the girls, after their first fright, knelt down and said the rosary, as the only means of not losing control of themselves.

Later, they were persuaded to go to their rooms, but not to sleep. Kathleen was the one exception. Nothing could keep her awake.

The boys hid behind the fence, near the narrow path that led up to the barn. Nobody could approach the barn, except by way of the path.

Eleven o'clock passed. Twelve. One. Dermot, who felt sleepy and cold, began to laugh at the others for believing Job's nonsense.

"Keep quiet and wait," said Dick. At this time, the country around was white in the moonlight.

Brian fell asleep, his head on a fence-rail.

He raised himself, suddenly. He had ears like a hare.

"Was that a breaking branch?"

"Hist!" whispered Dick. Three men were slowly creeping up the path.

One struck a match. He spoke in a low, but distinct tone—"The matches are all right. I was around here to-day, and I poured some kerosene into the pig-sty. There is a small can of it under the hen-house."

I left it there. By George! The blaze will surprise that fool that wouldn't help me to-day—the mean-spurred Romanist!"

It was Jim Windsor's voice. The men crept, in Indian file, slowly and quietly towards the hen-house.

The boys each seized a large stone, and waited until the men were quite out of the shadows. When they were full in the light, Dick raised his finger.

"You get the kerosene, Abe," Windsor said, to one of his followers, "and we'll set the fire going on the windward side."

"It's a nasty job, and I don't like it," said Abe. "These folks were mighty good to young Fitts."

"That's all very well, but I'm bound to get even with that young upstart. I'll make him pay for his impudence, and if you don't choose to join me, you can count me out when you want me to do you a turn."

Abe grumbled. Just then, Dick raised three fingers. The boys obeyed the signal as musicians obey the baton of a musical conductor. Instantly, each raised his arm with a will. There was a howl from the path. Dick sent one big stone after another in quick succession. Dermot and Brian followed his example. Two of the men ran off across the fields as quickly as they could.

One lay in the path, groaning piteously.

The boys went up to him. They recognized Jim Windsor, ghastly pale, with a large cut on his forehead. He looked up and recognized Dermot.

"Don't shoot me," he said, "don't shoot!"

Dermot gave his gun to Dick.

"I am not going to shoot," he said. "Are you much hurt?"

"Just as much as you could hurt me."

"Well, we don't kick men when they're down. We'll help you to the house, and let the law take care of you after that."

Jim made no answer. Dick stooped over him and saw that he had fainted.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Scrofula, whether hereditary or acquired, is thoroughly expelled from the blood by Hood's Sarsaparilla, the great blood purifier.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR PRAYER-BOOK.

From St. Joseph's Parish Messenger.

Take a look through the pews of almost any church, and you will be surprised at the number of old prayer-books scattered along them. There they lie like old wrecks on the seashore, and many of them are wrecks sure enough. Some of them have the covers torn off; others have lost forty or fifty pages; in some cases only half of the book is to be found,—the rest gone no one knows where; all telling, however, the same sad story of neglect on the part of their owners.

Perhaps they have no owners, and they float around from one pew to another until they become so dilapidated that the pastor gathers up an armful of them and burns them.

We see no reason why our Catholics should have so little regard for their prayer-books. Many of these have been blessed; some of them are presents from relatives or friends no more among the living; all of them are deserving of better treatment because of the prayers to Almighty God they contain. Learn to take better care of your prayer-book.

There is no need of leaving it after you in the church to represent you until the next Sunday. The natives of Thibet are said to fasten written prayers on the arms of their windmills, and then losing no time in their work, they imagine that the windmill, as it revolves, is reciting their prayers for them.

One would sometimes imagine that some Catholics entertained similar ideas in regard to their prayer books, and that by leaving them in the church from day to day, they would secure some merit from being represented by proxy by the silent book of prayer.

Don't think, either, that a prayer-book is like your best suit of clothes,—for use on Sundays only—it can be used with profit every day—for your morning and night prayers, for the recital of the litanies, for special prayers according to your circumstances, for meditation and instruction.

In this way your prayer-book will become a partner of your devotion, a vehicle of piety, and a reminder of your duties. When it wears out—and it is encouraging to see a prayer-book well thumbed—buy another one, and you need not contribute the old one to the collection already to be found among the pews of our churches.

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