FIVE-MINUTE SERMONS
FOR EARLY MASSES
By the Paulist Fathers.

Preached in their Church of St. Paul the Apostle, Fifty-ninth street and Ninth avenue, New York City.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

"If a man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his natural countenance in a glass. For he beheld himself and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was."—Epistle of the day.

I do not think, my brethren, that there are very many people at the present day who are so likely to forget how they look, as this man of whom St. James tells us. Probably the looking glasses were not so good at that time as they are now, and it may be that they were not looked in so often; they twisted up the face, perhaps, as a bad one will do now, so that they were used only in case of real need. So the comparison was more apt then than nowadays, when there are so many mirrors, and such good ones, and when, moreover, they are helped out very much by hosts of photographs and tintypes. But the thing compared, the matter which the comparison illustrates, remains in about the same state. The spiritual mirror is not very often consulted, and when it is the impression does not seem to stay long with the one who consults it. What is this spiritual mirror? What I mean by it is our conscience, enlightened by the word and law of God, made known to us by the instructions which we receive.

I am well aware that we are, to say the least, quite as likely to see our neighbors' faces by this light as our own. The sermons which we hear, if they are at all of a fault-finding character, seem to be just calculated for Mr., Mrs. or Miss So-and-So's case. Still, now and then, some feature of our own which is a little defective shows dimly through the fog. But though we get some good in this way, it is not equal to what comes to us in the tribunal of Penance, where the remarks made cannot possibly be addressed to any one else, where we are obliged to look at ourselves, and our habit of seeing the motes in other people's eyes is checked at every turn. There we really make some examination of conscience, and more is perhaps made for us, and for the time being, at any rate, we have a pretty fair idea of how we look spiritually, and of what changes ought to be made in our appearance, that we may be pleasing to the eye of Almighty God.

But how long does this impression last? I am afraid that too often the words of to-day's epistle are strictly applicable. "He presently forgot," says St. James, "what manner of man he was." "Presently," that is to say, immediately—just as soon as he stopped looking in the glass. Is not this true, my friends? Do you not, even on the way to the altar or to your seat to say your prayers, forget all about the faults you had just now to find with yourselves? You have a general idea that you are going to be good, at any rate up to the time that you receive Holy Communion; that you are going in every respect, at least for this little while, to keep to the chalk mark with great precision. But if any one should ask you what faults in particular you are going to look out for, could you answer without going back and rubbing up the glass of your conscience again?

Now, let us compare our way of acting in these spiritual matters with that of a person who is, we will say, a little particular about personal appearance. Such a one does not look in the glass for nothing. No; some special result is reached; the bang must be smoothed or the hat adjusted, or perhaps the moustache must be brushed or the necktie better arranged. And forthwith the desirable improvement is made, and the change contemplated with satisfaction.

Now, I do not mean to utterly condemn all reasonable care about such matters as these. Far from it. It is even praiseworthy to be careful about them, if one does not go too far, or waste time over them which should be given to more weighty concerns. Disorder and slovenliness are not in themselves virtues. But what I do mean is that the state of the soul is incomparably more important than that of the body or the clothes; that we should be far more anxious to do for it what we do so easily for them. And that one cannot be called properly a doer of the word, unless he makes a practical application of it to his own case, and goes into detail about it. If he neglects this, he will make no more progress than a boy would make in his lessons if he did not know whether the book he was studying was an arithmetic or a geography. Bear this in mind then: when you have had your lesson, and know what your faults are, take them home and study over them; keep them before your minds constantly till the remembrance of them has sunk well in and become habitual. Then, if you act on this remembrance and make use of it, will you be indeed a doer of the word, and be blessed in your deed.

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An Open Letter.

Nov. 25th, 1886.

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FORGING THE FETTERS:

United Ireland.

Our would-be jailers are hard at work in Westminster. They will not bate us an inch or an ounce of our irons. It is well that the white light of public opinion should be kept steadily focussed on their workshop. The searching and scorching criticism to which the Jubilee Coercion Act is being subjected must tell in the long run. That criticism is not for the House, but for the country. The Government and their camp followers are pinned to their policy. Retreat is for them as disastrous as advance. Coercion is the last resource of their despair. Dissolution looms ominously behind. Like the guilty tyrant in the play, "they have tied them to a stake; they cannot fly, but bear-like, they must fight the course." So it comes that they maintain their most indefensible proposals with such stolid obstinacy. They are dead to reason and shame—callous to argument and exposure. The discussion in Committee on the first clause of the Perpetual Coercion Bill exposed the Government proposal in all its naked atrocity. The plausible platitudes with which it was sought to cover it were ruthlessly stripped off. Never was such a display of meanness and malignity, of falsehood and of folly. The clause under discussion will be known indifferently in history as the Thumbscrew or the Star Chamber Clause. It is the corner-stone of the Bill. It is the key to the chamber of horrors. Its express purpose is to manufacture informers wholesale; or, in default, to imprison Nationalists wholesale. It gives to partisan Resident Magistrates an unlimited power of interrogation on the suspicion that an "offence" had been committed, with an unlimited power of imprisonment should the answering prove insufficient or unsatisfactory. In fact, it makes the beneficent jurisdiction of Judge Boyd universal and perpetual, and establishes the Star Chamber and Thumbscrew as National institutions in every Petty Sessions Court in Ireland. In this precious clause the two words "offence" and "crime" were jumbled up ingeniously together as if they were of identical meaning. Mr. Healy was quick to seize the advantage and turn the edge of their own trick upon the Government. He proposed that the word "crime" should be substituted for the word "offence" throughout the clause, and that the thumbscrew, if it must be applied at all, should only be applied where a crime had been committed. He, and after him Mr. Dillon, pointed out the nefarious use to which the section as it stood would be applied—the intolerable and humiliating tyranny it sanctioned. The liberty of the Press, free speech, and the sanctity of social life would be placed at the mercy of any bigoted partisan who had bought a place on the Petty Sessions Bench by dirty work done in the service of the Government and who was hungry for further promotion on the same terms. If a newspaper published an article which displeased the Government the whole staff might be imprisoned if they refused to disclose the author's name. The article we are at this moment penning may entail six months on the writer, or, in default, indefinite imprisonment on the staff, for, as the Attorney General for Ireland was kind enough to explain, the Act is to be retrospective in its operation. If a number of gentlemen of the same way of thinking meet at dinner a policeman can break in upon the company under the warrant of this precious clause, arrest the host and guests together, and break up the banquet in most admired disorder. Each one amongst them is liable to be examined on oath before a resident magistrate, and subjected to indefinite imprisonment if he refuses to betray the confidential conversation of his friends. That the Government mean to use these powers to the full is manifested from their desperate resolve to retain them intact in the Bill. They fought for them like wild cats on their backs. Common sense and common honesty were alike forgotten in the desperation of their defence. The silliest and most transparent subterfuges were made do duty as arguments. It was naively pointed out that the Act only applied to proclaimed districts, a restriction which can hardly be considered a very valuable security against its abuse by a Government which in its discretion can proclaim any district it pleases. It is a strange argument surely for arming an enemy with a dangerous and deadly weapon that he cannot use it unless he feels so disposed. Then the shamelessly dishonest suggestion was made that the clause went no further than the existing law and practice in Scotland. This suggestion has already been assiduously circulated out of doors. In Parliament the lie was promptly nailed. The Solicitor-General for Scotland was challenged as to the existence of such a practice and remained discreetly silent. Mr. Balfour, late Advocate General for Scotland, declared amidst ringing cheers that he had never known a case in which this power was exercised in Scotland, and even historically the power had only been used in the very gravest crimes. Finally there was a shamefaced and shambling attempt made to prove that "crimes" and "offences" were controvertible terms, and that the Government were the innocent victims of the clumsiness of their draftsman. Thereupon Mr. Gladstone promptly planted them on the sharp horns of a dilemma. If the terms were controvertible how, he asked with cutting sarcasm, could the Government justify its obstruction in wasting an entire night in resistance to a perfectly harmless amendment. At this final blow the Government discreetly abandoned all further attempts at reasoning, and appealed to the mechanical logic of the division lobby, when by the narrow majority of thirty-seven the thumbscrew was added to the Castle armoury of instruments of torture. The Government won and the Opposition lost, of course. Yet the Opposition regarded the defeat with exultation, and the Government regarded the victory with dismay. The *Times* and *Standard* groaned and growled next morning over the "maladroit" confessions by the Attorney-General for Ireland, that new offences are created under the Act which is to be retrospective in its operation. The admissions will damage the Coercion policy in the minds of impartial men more than half a hundred denunciations. It was in effect admitted that the Bill was not intended for the prevention or punishment of such old fashioned crimes as violence and murder, but is meant to deal with brand-new fantastical offences of its own creation. It is to rear its own offences as butchers fatten the beasts they kill. Combinations not of crime are its object—nay more, by confounding real crime with combinations heretofore regarded not merely as innocent but as laudable, will give criminals an immunity they have not heretofore possessed. It is a Bill for the encouragement, not for the prevention, of crime. In truth, the Bill is as blundering as it is brutal. Criticism is destruction to it. It is cheap, poor shoddy, and won't wash. The colours run in the hot water, and the stuff tears in the mangle Above all, it cannot stand daylight. Like the faded beauty in the comic song, it looks best in the dusk with the light behind it.

"It is a monster of such hideous mien
That to be hated needs but to be seen."

For us here in Ireland we are tolerably indifferent whether the Bill passes or not. Our indignation is largely leavened with contempt—indignation at the ferocious spirit of the Government—contempt for its absolute impotence. Armed in our own fortitude and in the honest friendship of the English democracy, we are ready to meet and beat the most ferocious coercion that brutal Tories and renegade Liberals can concoct between them.

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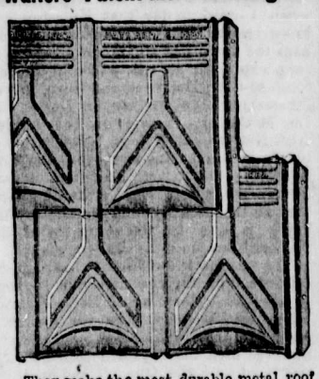

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