

A SERMON,

Preached in the Mission of Durham, Que., by
the REV. G. T. HARDING (Anglican Curate of
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"By their fruits ye shall know them."—ST. MATT. vii. 16.

These words have frequently been misinterpreted. Many have concluded from them that our Lord intended to give us liberty to judge our brethren, and a rule by which we should always be able to detect one who was not a sincere Christian. And these persons, acting upon such an assumption, have not scrupled in particular instances to say, "I know that such a person is not a true Christian, because of the way in which he lives;" or, "I know that such another could not act so and so, could not do such and such things, if he were a sincere believer, as he professes to be." Often, too, or generally, those things from which judgment is given are not such as to constitute one an open and notorious evil liver, but are trivial matters, such as are not in themselves evil, but may only become so by wrong use or through inordinate affection; such things, in fact, as one person may do without harm, while another may be greatly injured by doing them, and where, therefore, it is impossible to judge in any particular case whether they are harmless or injurious. In this way a spirit of discrimination and harsh judgment is engendered, which is contrary to the whole teaching of Christ as begun by Himself in His earthly ministrations and developed by the sacred writers in the epistles. But that the impressions regarding the words of the text, which have caused such a state of things, are wrong I shall now try to show you.

In the first place, Christ Himself tells us in this very sermon and in the chapter from which the text is taken, not to judge, that we "be not judged." And He teaches us by the parable of "The Tares" that we are not fitted, have not the proper faculties, to undertake the work of judgment: for when the servants ask their master if they shall "go and pull up the tares" which his enemy had sowed in the field, he says, "No! lest," he adds, "ye root up also the wheat with them." How could there be any danger of rooting up the wheat, unless that, from its position, and the close resemblance to it of the tares, it would be impossible in some places where the ear was not formed for the servants to distinguish the one from the other. "Let them both grow together," he goes on to say, "till the harvest," and then the proper persons, which, in the Kingdom of God, our Lord teaches, will be, not men, but angels, shall gather "first the tares" to burn them, leaving the wheat to be garnered.

Abundantly, also, in the epistles are we warned against judging a brother concerning the eating of meats that had been offered to idols. St. Paul says, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth." Again he says, "Why dost thou judge thy brother?" "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth;" "Why dost thou judge thy brother?" and "Let us not therefore judge one another any more." So, also, to the Corinthians he says, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart." And, finally, St. James says, "He that speaketh against a brother, or judgeth his brother, speaketh against the law and judgeth the law;" and he adds, with a touch of sarcasm, "If thou judge the law (then) thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge."

This will be sufficient to show that the interpretation which I have alluded to as being frequently given to the text cannot be correct, because it is not in harmony with other parts of Scripture. For it is a universal canon or rule for the interpretation of Scripture that, if the meaning attached to any passage is contradictory to other passages, or to the general tenor of Scripture, that meaning must be a wrong one.

But this will be still further apparent if we go on now to consider the true force and application of the words. If we look at the context, which should always be done when trying to get at the meaning of any passage of Scripture, we shall find that the

words are not intended to be taken in a general sense, but have reference to a certain particular danger which our Lord foresaw would arise in the Church, and against which He wished to warn the disciples. In the verse immediately preceding the text He says, "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheeps' clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Then He adds the words, "By their fruits ye shall know them." By noticing this connection we get an idea of the true primary force of the passage. Our Lord is here warning us against false teachers and instructing us as to how we shall be able to detect them, for the word "prophet" in this passage stands for teacher. The office of the prophet, as you know, was not merely that of one who foretells historical events, but of one who is commissioned and sent by God to guide, direct and teach in all matters, earthly or spiritual, where human knowledge or wisdom is inadequate. His duty was to bring messages from God on special occasions of importance, and these were generally delivered in God's name. The people of Israel under the old dispensation frequently came to the prophet to "enquire of the Lord" in their troubles and doubts—under any circumstances, in fact, when they did not know exactly what course to pursue, private individuals even might apply to the prophet; and the prophet would then instruct them in the name of God, generally using the formula "Thus saith the Lord." We have an example of this manner of seeking instruction in the case of Saul, who, before he was made King, was sent by his father to search for some asses that had gone astray. Being unable to find them, he at last went to the prophet Samuel to enquire concerning them, and was actually instructed by this great man. We find, also, from a note in the ninth verse of the chapter where the occurrence is related, that it was a common practice then to enquire of the prophets on such trivial matters. In much later times we have another example of the same kind. Jeroboam, when his child was sick, sent his wife, disguised, to the prophet Ahijah to learn what its fate would be. And there are besides these, of course, many instances recorded in which the kings and rulers in Israel enquired of the prophets concerning the public matters of the state.

But there were often, too, in those days false prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, who uttered smooth and pleasing words, such as they knew would best suit the wishes of those who came to the Lord with corrupt desires. Such prophets deceived, by false teaching, for the sake of worldly gain, or in order to acquire an influence and a power over the people, or the rulers, though some of them were probably themselves deceived. This will have an important bearing upon our subject. St. Peter alludes to such a class when he says, (2 Pet. ii. 1), "There were false prophets also among the people;" and in doing so, he adds, with reference to Christian times, "Even as also there shall be among you false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them."

Now these are, no doubt, the same false prophets referred to by our Lord in the passage we are considering. And concerning them, also, most likely does He speak in St. Matt. xxiv.: "Take heed that no man lead you astray: for many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ, and shall lead many astray." And again (v. 24), "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." These latter passages of course refer more immediately to the times and circumstances connected with the Second Advent; but the one we are considering applies to all false prophets, and our text will serve to instruct us in trying to detect any that may arise.

We may believe then that our Lord, in the part of His discourse which we have before us, is looking into the future, is thinking of those false teachers, who, from time to time, should arise to endanger the Church's safety, and "lead many astray," and that it is concerning these He speaks the words of the text, "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

But here, before we can make a right application of these words to the false teachers mentioned, we

must notice what is said as to the manner of their coming, or the garb in which they shall appear. We are warned that they will be most dangerous, and for the very reason that they shall come with fair appearance, or in the actual garb of piety. They will not be open enemies, they will not seem to be "wolves;" will not be clothed as wolves. They "come to you in sheep's clothing." Now the lamb, in Scripture, is a representation of innocence and purity. It was a type of Christ, "the Lamb of God," "who did no sin," who was "without spot"; and sheep may certainly be regarded as typifying the sincere Christian, who is without guile or hypocrisy. Hence we may understand the prophets referred to here, to be innocent in appearance—coming outwardly with Christian good works: nay, we may go further. We may separate the false teachers from their system, and expect to find many of them really sincere and holy in their lives—blameless in their conduct, respected by all men, and not in any way conscious hypocrites. For if they are to come as open evil livers,—corrupt in their lives and full of notorious wickedness, then we should have no difficulty in detecting them, and our Lord's warning would, in that case, be scarcely necessary: they would, in that case, be really in wolves', not in sheep's clothing. Or even as hypocrites—outwardly good, but inwardly unclean—they would still soon be detected.

But in what manner then shall we apply the text and what force will it have?

If these also prophets may, in some cases—in their most dangerous form—be really good men, how, you will ask, can we possibly detect them? for we must surely suppose that their doctrines would be of a very subtle character, not capable themselves of being shown to be false. How in other words shall we, following our Lord's direction, "know these prophets by their fruits?" In this way. We must, as I suggested above, separate, altogether, the teachers from the system or doctrines which they propagate. I believe that our Lord really means that we should judge the teaching, or the system of doctrine, by its fruit, not the teachers by them, nor the doctrine by the private life of those who set it forth.

(To be continued.)

There are in the city and county of Philadelphia, 82 Churches, and 13,479 communicants. The number of Churches is greater than that in New York city, but the number of communicants is somewhat less. But the above statement is not a full showing. The N. Y. *Guardian* gives a list of 93 places of worship in Philadelphia, where the Book of Common Prayer is used on Sundays by regular congregations, omitting the chapels which are only used for Sunday Schools and week-day services. On the whole, our Church seems to be considerably stronger in proportion to the population in Philadelphia than in New York.

Baptisms.

WHITE—Aug. 23rd, Robert, son of George and Margaret Jane White, of Albion Mines.
WAKMAN—Aug. 25th, at Westville, during Evening Prayers, Alfred, son of Thomas and Elizabeth Wakman.

Marriages.

SEARLE—GRAVES—At Petitediac, on the 2nd inst., by the Rev. C. Willis, Charles Searle to Miss Mary E. Graves.

Deaths.

LELACHEUR—Feast of St. Bartholomew, New Glasgow, Ernest Alfred, son of John and Ellen LeLacheur, aged 7 weeks.
COSSITT—At Sydney, C.B., August 19th, Mary Dumaresq, daughter of the Rev. Ranna Cossitt, first Rector of the Parish of St. George, Cape Breton, aged 93 years.
SOLOMON—At Lunenburg, on the 19th inst., George T. Solomon, Esq., Barrister, and Judge of the Probate, much esteemed and respected, in the 83rd year of his age.
PICKETT—At Manchester, Va., Aug. 20th, Lewis Sherwood, eldest son of Rev. D. W. and Helen Pickett, of Greenwich, N.B., in the 28th year of his age.