

or neglect. Why, then, does it not more prevail? Why should any despise this duty? I confess I can only perceive two reasons—either self-indulgence or indifference—either a disinclination to deny appetite, and therefore for the admitting of any excuse for continuing the usual mode of living, or a deadness of spiritual feeling, which refuses to use any special effort to subdue the flesh to the spirit.

Let me then first advert to the claims, upon the attention of Christians, which fasting possesses.

Can anything be plainer than the Old Testament Scriptures? The armies of Moab and Ammon threaten Jehoshaphat with instant attack and he is helpless before their hosts. Wise man! he proclaims a fast, commits himself to the God of battles, and goes forth to meet the enemy. The conflict is not for a moment doubtful: Moab is delivered into his hand. Again the sentence had gone forth, "Nineveh shall be overthrown." They turn to God with fasting, repentance and prayer, and Nineveh is saved. The haughty Sennacherib looks upon his mighty host, mocks at Hezekiah's thought of resistance; but Hezekiah resorts to the Lord with fasting and intercession; and woe to Sennacherib! The example therefore of the Old Testament worthies in the matter of fasting is unquestionable.

The precept is no less distinct. As an instance (evidently indicating the mind of our Church) the portion of Scripture appointed for the Epistle for Ash Wednesday is most conclusive. "Turn unto the Lord" saith the Prophet Joel, "Turn unto the Lord with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning;" and then he adds this promise: "The Lord will be jealous for His land and pity His people." The Lord will answer, "I will send you corn and wine and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith."

But, asks one, "What saith the New Testament?" In reply I point you to the mountain side. "Do you see that lonely man all wet with dew, bent low upon the grass? Do you not know him? That is Jesus. Do you not know His work? He is spending livelong nights in fasting and prayer. And to learn our duty need we go beyond this our example?" And then that same Jesus in His sermon said, "When ye fast, fast not as the hypocrites, but fast in secret before your Heavenly Father," and speaks of it in the same connection with almsgiving and prayer. "But" (objects another) "I do not consider that a command." "Well," I reply, our blessed Lord told His Disciples. "This is the better and beneficial way to fast, and then you will appear unto your Heavenly Father to fast, and that fasting shall be rewarded." Surely it is inconceivable, that in such a sermon, at such a time, our Lord would give directions how to perform a duty, would promise a reward to those who rightly performed it, and yet