

CHATS WITH YOUNG MEN.

Now that Lent is here, a consideration of the reason why the Church orders its members to do penance will be not only opportune, but also aceptually instructive:

WHY WE SUFFER.

To go to the root meaning of asceticism: it is "askesis," to practice or to exercise; "askesis," an athlete. From time immemorial and amongst all classes of people bodily exercise and discipline have ever been held and felt to be a means of acquiring moral and spiritual perfection. Amongst various classes of men there have been varying degrees of strictness in this self-discipline, ranging from those who sought nothing more than mere temperance to those who inflicted themselves with extreme austerities. St. Paul, however, carried on the widest diversity—the saint, the stoic, the athlete, or the fakir. But always the general and primary end in view was to subdue the material to the spiritual.

In the early Church there was a body of fervent Christians known as the Ascetics. According to the Apostolic Canon they were placed as a class between the clergy and the laity. They did not leave the world, like monks or hermits, but tried to carry on their lives of self-discipline in the world, using as means thereto, fasting, prayer, chastity and castigation of the body. The predominant motive of their exercise and training seems to have been simply the subduing of their lower nature. Here we have the embryo of asceticism. Along with the development of the Christian religion the ascetical idea and practice developed also. The ulterior motive for subduing the lower nature was love of God. When once the line of mere temperance had been passed, the motive of love of God would naturally seek other means to express itself. Thus the motives of expiation of sin became more explicit. But as bodily pain, whether of renunciation or of endurance, had come to be acknowledged as the ordinary means of expressing love for God, it thus became the recognized means not only of subduing the lower nature, but also of atoning for the past sin and of supplicating for future needs. This, then, was the development and the scope of Christian asceticism.

We confess at the outset that we know of no intrinsic reason why suffering should be a necessary companion of love. We merely state the fact that it is so; and we appeal to the whole of human experience to support the assertion. It may be that the renunciation and endurance necessary for the due observance of the natural law and the Ten Commandments fostered the conviction that pain was the companion of love, it may be that the human soul, since it was naturally Christian from the beginning, sought to anticipate the Christian doctrine of love and suffering; it also may have been part of a divine primitive revelation. Our first parent, indeed, seems to have needed to pass through the fire of violent temptation and renunciation before he could be established in his eternal joy. But whatever may have been the origin of the law, a law it is, and a law which all must recognize. It is the very foundation of asceticism, and once clearly apprehended it saves us from the Scylla of superstitious pain-worship on the one hand, and the Charybdis of hedonistic indulgence on the other.

Self-inflicting suffering is effective both in subduing rebellious nature and in obtaining forgiveness of past sins and in pleading for future favors. It is not that Almighty God derives any pleasure at the sight of suffering; that would show Him to be the most cruel of all beings. No; God dislikes and hates the sufferings as much as anyone, but He allows it because, from the nature of the case, it is necessary for the generation, the strengthening and the perfection of love. The perverse promptings of lower nature are obstacles to the free exercise of love; sin is the actual withholding of love; the request for future favors is merely asking for more love; therefore it is that Almighty God, whilst regretting the contingent suffering; allows it for the sake of the love of which it is the condition, the measure, and the expression.

The neglect of this distinction is the source of false asceticism; whilst much of the unpopularity of true asceticism is traceable to the same cause. But the Church has ever been on her guard lest a perverted system should obtain within her fold. The history of the Flagellants in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries suffices to show us the mind and attitude of the Church with regard to self-inflicted suffering. These misguided zealots in their bodily mortifications were not doing more than the saints had done, but their motives were wrong, and so they brought upon themselves the condemnation of Pope Clement VI.

Asceticism of this kind is nothing else but a superstitious pain-worship. On the part of the sufferer the motive is pride; on the part of the onlooker, morbid curiosity. It was an asceticism something like this which our Lord rebuked in the intolerant austerity of the Pharisees and formalists of the towns as well as in the aloofness of the dwellers in the desert.

If our Lord had looked upon suffering as something good, beautiful, or admirable in itself, He would not have exhorted His disciples to seek often in relieving and destroying it. It was always with Him a means subordinated to an end, and in so far as its infliction was good for the perfection of a soul He counseled it also in so far as its removal was good for a soul, He removed it. Thus, in the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, our Lord would have compassion on the multitude and would not send them away fasting, lest they should faint by the way. But He made the occasion an opportunity of showing His power

over the physical laws of bread, and so prepared the minds of the people for His reaching on the Holy Eucharist. Similarly He healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, to illustrate His power to give spiritual health and strength. Likewise He healed the man born blind, to manifest His office as the Light of the world.

No, health or sickness, joy or sorrow, suffering or pleasure, may be equally efficient as means of salvation. They are all God's gifts and must be used so far, and only so far, as they are helpful to salvation.—Rev. Thomas J. Gerrard.

OUR BOYS AND GIRLS.

An Inspiration.  
On thy cold gray stones, O sea,  
And I would that my tongue could utter  
The thoughts that arise in me.

It was Ash Wednesday and the sea and the stones and the sky were leaden gray. The gray sea broke on the gray stones with dreary monotony as it often does on the rock-bound coast of Nova Scotia.

It was not yet sunrise for it wanted ten minutes to six when Evelyn Hall entered the convent chapel to assist at early Mass.

The drive over a hard, frosty road, the desolation of the whole coast at this early hour caused a feeling of sadness to creep over the heart of our heroine. Years ago she would have only heard the merry jingle of the sleigh bells and the patter of the horse's hoofs on the snow crust. But circumstances shape one's thoughts and thoughts shape one's circumstances. All along the country road the words of the poet would ring out through the vacant chambers of her brain in pathetic cadence.

Break, break, break,  
On thy cold gray stones, O sea,  
And I would that my tongue could utter  
The thoughts that arise in me.

It had been an intensely cold winter and Evelyn had been living out in the country for the first time in her life. It is true she had a devoted husband, five charming children and a comfortable home. What more could she demand? She was not of a despondent nature; in girlhood she was the gayest of the gay, but since she had married and settled in a small mining town of Nova Scotia and left behind her her girlhood friends and her old associations, she had days when in spite of all her reserve force she missed her past life of bustle and excitement, and, feeling dull, fancied her life a failure.

She walked up the narrow aisle of the convent chapel, and kneeling down before the altar of our Lady buried her face in her hands. When she lifted her eyes, now moistened with tears, they rested on a tall, graceful lily which held her captive. That is a beautiful specimen of a plant, thought Evelyn, the five perfect leaves growing as it were from the root and guarding the pure white flower in the centre. It seemed to lift its head with pride before the statue of its Queen, "Our Lady of Victories," as if to say, "I have bloomed amid the snows, I have lived my short life away from the excitement of the city in the convent conservatory, sheltered day by day from the strong blasts by a covering of glass, growing day by day and pining only for the time when I should arrive at maturity and be considered worthy to stand in my prime and to fade again before the Queen of Heaven."

It was indeed a beautiful reflection and it had its effect.  
"Surely I can arise from my gloomy meditations," reasoned our friend. "My life should be as pure and perfect when the message comes to stand before the Master as this flower before me. It shines forth in its completeness filling this dreary March morning with brightness and hope. I, too, may live a perfect life, surrounded by family ties, shut out from the temptations of a great city, free from city folk and city gossip, strengthened by dependence on little children, and safe in the love and protection of a kind and considerate husband."

Evelyn Hall realized that after all her life was full indeed. Dreary thoughts were banished from her existence, and when Mass was over and she returned home over the same frosty road, everything was changed and she transposed the verse of the poet to suit her own reflections.

Break, break, break  
On the fragrant grass, O sea,  
And the tender grace of a day that has come  
Will ever come back to me.

Years passed but her own life flowed on cheered always by the remembrance of that noble flower that brightened up her life not only for a day but for time and eternity—"Evelyn" in Antigonish Casket.

Beauty of Modesty.  
There is an unspeakable beauty in modesty that even the wicked admire. The blush that crimsones the brow of the innocent, mysteriously comes as a mantle to shield the pure soul from even an impure breath, or a wanton glance. The lily is the Scriptural emblem of the modesty pure. How pure and beautiful is the lily above all the blossoms of the valley, fairest of fair flowers! How wondrously beautiful is modesty in woman! How she wins all hearts until she is looked upon with a feeling akin to reverence! She seems an angel upon earth. Modesty is becoming in all. The eye of God turns upon the modestly pure with a divine pleasure. The angels throng about them and the angels love them because purity is a wonderful grace. It is a pearl of great price. At the resurrection the pure will shine with a light surpassing all others. Their lives here sanctify the places wherein they move or dwell, and dangers are averted and blessings come, because God's place is turned towards their abiding place. Solomon once wrote: "O, how beautiful is the chaste generation. It is possible to be pure if we live God above all things." St. Paul says: "Our God is a consuming fire." His love burns away the dross of every unworthy affection. To be pure we must love infinite purity. If you love

Him you will scorn to love anything else. Strive with your whole might to be pure. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."—Phillip O'Neill, in Catholic Mirror.

LEARN TO BE KINDLY.

There are many people who excuse themselves from the little familiarities and kindnesses of life on the ground that they are not natural to them. These people say that they are reserved by disposition, and cannot be free and easy in meeting people. But we can learn to be gentle and gentle just as we can learn to row a boat or to throw stones or to write shorthand or to speak a new language. That homeliness and unaffected simplicity of address, which made Raskin so approachable to child or man, was the work of a long life's discipline. The strongest of men, he had made himself the servant of all, and, judged by his own standard, his greatness had lain just here.

LENTEN REGULATIONS ARE NOT HANDSHIPS.

Having passed beyond the second Sunday of the penitential season, a few practical thoughts may be of benefit in discharging the obligations which it enjoins. Of course, those who have thus far succeeded in complying with the Lenten regulations appreciate the fact that they impose no hardships. Henceforth their task of observance will be an easy matter.

But there are always some who regard the keeping of these regulations as a physical impossibility. They plead excuses of various kinds, and suiting their judgment to their inclination and convenience, dispense themselves from the law of the Church. At each Lenten season they discover that they can neither fast nor abstain.

Omitting consideration of the sin they commit, their position is positively wrong. In fact, it is absurd, as they themselves may have demonstrated on other occasions for other reasons during the year.

To begin with, the rigors of these regulations have been so largely eliminated in this country by special dispensations from the Holy See, that there are really few who cannot easily comply with them if they have a desire to do so. True, there may be some inconvenience experienced, but it is fully to speak of suffering thereby. Those who set up the claims of hardship and injury to health do so in opposition to excellent medical opinion and against the wide experience and common observation of others. This is a statement which hardly admits of contradiction. Physicians, many and eminent, are constantly reminding us that we eat too much. That we should curtail our meat and extend our diet to other foods. Is this not a refutation of the "can't fast claimants"?

Then comes the athlete and the beauty cure, the one to condemn the men, the other the women, who complain of their inability to observe the law. To see the purpose in view both subject themselves to sacrifices and self-denials far more severe and of much longer duration than is prescribed by the fast and abstinence of Lenten regulations. We might add that we are honored with the friendship of a gentleman, a member of one of the largest business concerns of its kind in this city, who for ten years or more has lived almost entirely on a diet of crackers and water because of an ailment of the stomach. He is apparently robust, gives his personal attention daily to the details of his business interests, loves a joke, can tell a good story and is never heard to complain of any suffering from his compulsory fast.

To the willing non-observers, therefore, these facts should serve to stimulate them to a discharge of their obligations in regard to the Lenten regulations. It is folly to contend that they cannot. It is absurd to insist that

the Church would impose impossible restrictions. Of course, we do not refer to those persons whom the laws of Lent specifically exempt, but to those who imagine themselves afflicted and thus dispense themselves from the law. Church Progress.

A LESSON FOR CATHOLICS.

The indifference of the majority of Catholics to the newspapers, which are published specially for the promotion of these interests is a matter of serious concern to those who have the welfare of the Church and advance of morality and religion at heart. The press is universally acknowledged as a most potent factor, in directing public opinion, and consequently, those interested in various enterprises or organizations, lend willing and earnest support to newspapers, which encourage, promote and defend their respective enterprises or organizations.

The Catholic press is devoted almost entirely to the news of Catholic activity throughout the world, to articles of instruction upon religious questions, to the defence of Catholic truth, Catholic education, Catholic institutions and Catholic people, to the publication of entertaining literature of a healthy, moral tone. It would, therefore, seem to be only the duty of sincere practical Catholics to co-operate with the publishers of Catholic papers to the end that our press may become stronger, more influential and powerful for good.

From the condition of religious affairs in France to-day, Catholics may learn a sad lesson of the result of neglecting to lend proper support to the Catholic press. Says the Liverpool Catholic Times:

"The Catholics of France are keenly regretting that they allowed, and even helped the enemies of the Church to build up a powerful press whilst neglecting to provide and encourage journals of their own. Why is it that when the feelings of foreigners are excited to burning indignation at the persecution in France the French people themselves as a whole appear to be cold and almost indifferent? Is it because poison has been distilled amongst them day after day; papers that have spread calumnies about the priests, the Bishops, and the Pope have circulated in large numbers not only in the towns but also in the villages and rural districts. Some of these journals are sold by the million, and carry into every corner of France plans for spoliation and prescription. Not only was the need for defense by means of the Catholic press disregarded, but the journalistic initiative of individuals was sometimes opposed. If the Catholics could introduce into the majority of French homes Catholic papers full of vigor

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