

# Dominion Churchman.

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## THE OBSERVANCE OF LENT.

The season of Lent is well suited for an attentive consideration of the means adopted by the Church for the promotion of holiness and for the Christian's growth in grace. It is for this reason that discipline was more especially and more publicly exercised in the early Church at this season; and, on this account also, more systematic and more general attention has been given to teaching the principles of our Holy Religion, and especially to preaching sermons during Lent than at any other time. It is directed by the Church to be used as a season of mortification, partly because such a course of humiliation is best calculated to enable us to celebrate in a becoming manner, the greatest gift that man could receive, or that highest heaven could bestow. Fasting and charity are therefore the two duties to which our services are more particularly directed at this time. The Epistles and Gospels, which are the same as those in the old Missals, are especially selected to direct our attention to these objects. The Epistles are particularly directed to an enunciation and illustration of the duties connected with mortification, self denial, and the purification of the flesh and the spirit. The Gospels for the Sundays in Lent are more particularly designed to excite us to the exercise of the great duty of charity in many of its innumerable branches. They propose to us the example of our great Lord and Master, the blessed Jesus, who not only fasted and withstood the greatest temptations of doing evil in his own person, as we find in the Gospel for the first Sunday in Lent, but went over the country seeking opportunities of doing good to others. His healing the sick is recorded in the Gospel for the second Sunday; feeding the hungry, in the Gospel for the third Sunday; blessing those that cursed him, in that for the fourth; and doing good to those that spitefully used him, in that for the fifth.

Whenever any great work has been undertaken by the Church, or any great revival has originated in it, there has generally been previously, and always attending and following it, an increased attention to those means of grace which are ordinarily adopted by her members. The duty of fasting is perhaps the one which is more particularly noticeable, as that which is, in multitudes of instances, almost entirely laid aside in the ordinary procedure of the Church, but to which the greatest attention is paid in those extraordinary seasons of refreshing which come "from the presence of the Lord." The Saviour of men set us the example, when he fasted forty days and forty nights, previous to his entrance on his public ministry. That he intended this practice should continue in his Church, we may gather from the

fact that he gives directions, "When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites of a sad countenance;" and also from the intimation—"This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting," St. Matt. xvii. 21. The system was taken up by the Apostolic Church, as among other instances we find in Act xiii. 3, that "when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on" Barnabas and Saul, they sent them away for the work whereunto the Holy Ghost had called them. And who among those who profess to take the Bible for their guide, shall presume to pour contempt on a practice recommended by so much Scriptural authority?

At that great epoch in the history of the Western Church, which took place three hundred years ago, our Reformers placed so much importance upon the duty that they have given us two homilies upon the subject; an attentive perusal of which, at this time, could not fail to be eminently beneficial. The first is called "An homily of good works: and first of fasting." The second is termed "The second part of the Homily of fasting." The motto taken, is from Eph. ii. 10. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." The homily guards us from supposing that these words mean "to induce us to have any affianee, or to put any confidence in our works, as by the merit and deserving of them to purchase to ourselves and others remission of sin, and so consequently everlasting life." "For it is of the free grace and mercy of God by the mediation of the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, without merit or deserving on our part, that our sins are forgiven us, that we are reconciled and brought again into his favor, and are made heirs of His Heavenly Kingdom." St. Paul is referred to as teaching three reasons for good works: to show ourselves obedient children, as testimonies of our justification, and to excite others to glorify our Father which is in heaven. The homily also lays considerable stress upon the Scripture declaration that "at the last day, every man shall receive of God, for his labour done in true faith, a greater reward than his works have deserved;" and the good work that is to be first particularly spoken of is one, "whose commendation is both in the law and in the Gospel,"—"fasting, which is found in the Scriptures to be of two sorts; the one outward, pertaining to the body; the other inward, in the heart and mind. This outward fast is an abstinence from meat, drink, and all natural food, yea from all delicious pleasures and delectations worldly." Scripture instances are referred to at length, as showing the nature and extent of the duty; and allusion is made to the Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451, to show how the primitive Christians understood and practiced the duty; they decreeing that "whosoever did eat or drink before the

evening prayer was ended, should be accounted and reputed not to consider the purity of his fast." And the homily thus concludes:—"Fasting then by the decree of those six hundred and thirty fathers, grounding their determination in this matter upon the sacred Scriptures, and long continued usage or practice, both of the Prophets and other godly persons before the coming of Christ, and also of the Apostles and other devout men in the New Testament, is a withholding of meat, drink, and all natural food from the body, for the determined time of fasting." The profit and acceptableness of the duty are distinctly stated to be three-fold:—to bring the flesh into subjection to the spirit; to ensure that the spirit may be more earnest and fervent in prayer; and that our fast may be a testimony that we are inwardly touched with sorrowfulness of heart, bewailing the same in the affliction of our bodies.

And later still,—we may adduce the agents of the religious movement in the Church during the last century, and that principal actor among them, Wesley, one of the most remarkable and thorough-going High Churchmen since the Reformation. He laid the greatest stress on fasting, both by his teaching and by his practice. What those who profess to be his followers now, may do or teach, is nothing to our present purpose. The more recent Oxford movement also, with its results, was much indebted to the observance of the same practice; and indeed whenever and wherever the Gospel in its purity and in its fulness has won its legitimate triumphs, this branch of self-denial has always had its due share of attention. The right exhibition of Christ and Him crucified is inseparable from the institutions, the ordinances, the means of grace which He Himself has either appointed, or by his example and teaching, has sanctioned.

Other branches of duty, specially applicable to the present season, must be reserved for our next issue.

Mr. DISRAELI'S pet ecclesiastical scheme, the Public Worship Act, intended, its author acknowledged, to work only in one direction, that is, to put down only one class of law-breakers, does not seem likely to facilitate matters, any more than the old Court of Arches. The bungling uncertainty with which Lord Penzance, as judge, went through the first case which came before him; that of Mr. Ridsdale, and the fact that he has found it necessary to write a letter to the public papers in order to explain the argument he used and the judgment he gave, show that the questions raised are neither capable of so easy a solution, nor to be so easily shelved as some appear to have imagined. Some of his logic is still incomprehensible and needs further explana-