

The Western Churchman.

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Master for the Editorial department should be addressed to REV. C. R. JOHNSTONE, Box 310, Winnipeg, Man.

All business communications, money orders, etc., should be sent to The Stovel Co., Printers, Winnipeg.

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LENT.

Welcome, dear feast of Lent! Who loves not thee
 He loves not temperance, nor authority,
 But is composed of passion.
 The Scriptures bid us fast; the church says now;
 Give to thy mother what thou wouldst allow
 To every corporation.
 'Tis true—we cannot reach Christ's 40th day;
 Yet to go part of that religious way
 Is better than to rest.
 We cannot reach our Saviour's purity;
 Yet we are bid be holy, even as He,
 In both let's do our best.
 Who goeth in the way that Christ has gone
 Is much more sure to meet Him, than one
 That travelleth byways.
 Perhaps my God, tho' He be far before,
 May turn, and take me by the hand, and
 more,
 May strengthen my decays.

In another day or two, Lent will have come; and, it is surely right and natural that every good Churchman should be considering how he is going to observe this important season. There is a common impression abroad that the observance of Lent should lie mainly with the

clergy and with those who have leisure to give to more frequent services. Far too many of our laity pay little or no attention to it. This ought not to be. The observance of this holy season is obligatory upon every baptized Christian.

1 Reason and common sense demand it. God has given to man a body as well as a soul, and it is right that the body should enjoy innocent recreation, to keep it active and healthy; still, it is possible to overrate these harmless joys, to the depreciation of spiritual things. In fact, we know from our experience of life, that such is very often the case. Surrounded by friends and associates, among social pleasures and enjoyments, taken up with earthly things, we are apt to lose sight of higher joys; we need, like our Blessed Master, to go aside, at times, from the noise and bustle, for quiet and rest. The busy city merchant, who has to live through the greater part of the year amid the bustle and excitement of a busy centre of commerce, feels that he really requires a short holiday every year; he wants to get away from everything that reminds him of business, away to "green fields and pastures new," or to some sequestered spot by the lake-side, where the harmony of nature is all-prevailing. Even so, on economic principles, if on no higher grounds, the quiet Lenten season is a real necessity to every Christian soul. The struggle for existence is nowadays so keen, that men are very apt to give it the first place in their thoughts; the interests of communities and nations demand much attention; and the amenities of social life are all-absorbing. As a needful break in this life of business and worldly pleasure comes the quiet Lenten season, as a breathing time in which souls may be built and strengthened for the battle against evil.

2. The example of our Blessed Lord demands it. He Himself fasted 40 days and nights, not for a remedy. (He was sinless, and needed none), but for an example, as a master teaching His pupils the need that there is for a complete subjection of the flesh to the spirit. It is a noteworthy fact that, after every period of exhaustive work, the Master retired to solitude for prayer and meditation. We know that He often betook Himself to a lone mountain-side,

where He could be alone with Nature in all its sublimity, alone with Nature's God. There He could pour forth all His soul to His Father in Heaven, and plead for His poor erring people; there He could speak of His loved disciples, their want of faith, their weakness, their difficulties; there He could lay bare His own trials and sorrows, and get strength for them all, there He could, for a time, escape from contact with sin and misery, and bask in the light of eternal love. How He felt the need of these short periods of rest and refreshment! How He valued them! How careful he was that they should be unbroken—undisturbed! If He felt the need of such seasons, how much more must we?

3. The church demands it. The whole tenor of the church's teaching indicates the need that there is for a special season of self-denial and self-examination in every Christian year. The special services appointed for Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, express clearly and definitely her wishes in this respect. The portion of Holy Scripture appointed for the epistle is chosen from the Book of the Prophet Joel, and gives ample authority from the Old Testament for such a season, the Gospel gives the Saviour's authority, and along with it a setting forth of the Divine principles upon which Christians are to base their observance of Lent. They are to keep Lent voluntarily, cheerfully, unassumingly,—for God's glory, the good of the church as a body, and the advancement of our own spiritual life.

How are we to keep Lent?

1. By keeping as free as possible from worldly excitement, and so enabling ourselves to give more time to the cultivation of the spiritual life. The 40 days of quietness will, if well kept, have in them many happy hours; will bring us a rich meed of refreshing strength.

2. By trying, with God's help, to look into our inmost hearts, and to see ourselves as we really are, as we would be if arraigned before the great Judge. Only thus can we be fully aware of our sinfulness, and be truly penitent; it is only when we are truly penitent that we can hope for forgiveness.