

THE LENTEN TIME.

BY THE EDITOR.



most ancient origin it is, and handed down to us from the early Fathers. The Greek, Roman, and Oriental Churches, as well as ourselves, have clung to the season—a commemoration of the time when Christ spent forty days in the wilderness fasting. From the earliest days it has been a fasting—a time of self-denial, self-examination, penitence. In whatever shape or form the penitence may have been expressed, the one central idea is the same. It is good now and again, and at stated periods, to set apart a portion of time for a little private conversation with ourselves; away from outside influence, from the opinion of our friends, from the pressure of circumstances, to look ourselves in the face, just as we are, and to learn how we stand in such an examination. Lent is a season of spiritual and moral stock-taking, just as essential in every well-conducted life as the principle of stock-taking in a commercial establishment. We know where we have gained, and where we have lost; where we should retrench, and where we may spend; on which side of the sheet stands our yearly balance.

Not that the world has always kept the penitential idea well in view, in its Lenten observances. It has too often done the very opposite.

SHROVE TUESDAY,

for example, the day preceding Ash Wednesday, instead of being a day of sobering our minds down to our quiet talk with ourselves, has been more of a riotous outburst of merriment, as if we were determined to have one good fling of thoughtlessness before we commenced our thoughtfulness—a sort of “last touch,” to be quits with the world beforehand.

The great Carnival in Rome and in Venice was an expression of this feeling—a last fling festival of masquerade, fooling, and buffoonery. The rich began this feasting and fun in good time, to have plenty of it. The poor could only have a few days. The clergy, in olden times, strange to say, began first of all, and we are, most of us, familiar with the extent of magnificence, prodigality, and riot, to which the carnival was carried. Its culminating point, its climax, took place on the eve of

ASH WEDNESDAY.

This last fling idea gave rise, from time to time, to many ludicrous customs, which could not well be explained on any other principle, much less upon a principle of deep religious intensity. Shrove Tuesday carries in its name the idea of a stated period when we could, in a very special manner, feel that we were *shrived*, or *shrove*, that is, forgiven, absolved from all wrong that we had done, so that we might the more easily enjoy the Lenten time. But instead of humble and reverent customs that would have been the sweetest form for our gladness to take, we find all sorts of mirth, and even what we should think fun not very refined.

The penitence began on Monday, which was called

COLLOP MONDAY,

but not because the people in old days were so sad that they could not eat. Everybody eat as much as he was able, and sometimes more than he was able, of collups of salted meat and eggs. At dawn on Tuesday morning bells rang the people out, not to prayers but to fun, to

merriment, to feasting. The great dish of the day was “pancakes,” and what piles of them were devoured; so many that the people began tossing them around in play. A great thing was who could best toss them in the pan, and old books are full of very funny pictures and stories of the fun over the tossing. Sometimes the first pancake, brown from the pan, was, with much grotesque sport, presented to the laziest boy or girl. Again it was fastened up on the door of the school-house, to the knocker, for every door had a knocker then instead of a bell. Curious it is, too, how customs cling, however void of sense they may be. Even now, at the present day, in the great

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

of London, this early fashion is kept up. In the early morning of Shrove Tuesday the beadle of the Abbey, in his gown, and carrying a silver baton, walks in state out of the college garden, followed by the school-cook dressed in a white jacket, apron and cap, and carrying, with much dignity, a pancake. Entering the school-room door he tosses his pancake about in the pan, and then among the boys. Such a scramble! Such tumbling and piling of boys in heaps over the prize! When the poor pancake is captured, if indeed it should survive to tell the tale of the scramble, the successful boy marches off in triumph to the Dean and claims a guinea as his reward. The cook receives two.

TO GO BACK TO OLDEN TIMES,

football was the event of Shrove Tuesday. It was conspicuously the penitential game. Now, between ourselves, let it be said that a sound grain of truth lies in this custom, whether our forefathers intended it or not. A game of football, or any good romp in the fresh air, ought to be a very penitential occupation. The bright air, the joyous sun, the exercise, the healthy rivalry, the laugh over our own success, or our own (not another's) defeat, the fine flow of animal spirits, should make us ashamed of ourselves for having done wrong in the past, and should make us resolve to have no more to do with such meanness in the future. For all wrong-doing is mean, and unmanly.

Well, our great great-grandfathers in dear old England had their great games of football on Shrove Tuesday, although, I am sorry to say, they sometimes forgot themselves so much that timid ladies had to put the shutters on their windows. The game lasted for hours. The Mayor turned out to applaud, and, tell it not in Gath, the ladies—even Madame the Mayoress—joined in,—“belonged,” as our young Canadians would say.

The village boys made an effigy, called an “ivy girl,” which they said they stole from the girls; and away at the other end of the meadows the girls made one, called “holly boy,” which they claimed to have succeeded in snatching from the boys. Both figures were very uncouth and homely, the more so the better fun, and then both were carried in procession to a fire in readiness, and, amid the most riotous cheering, were consigned to the flames. I hardly see the penitence of this—

NOR OF THIS,

when the scholars barred the school-master out for three days, made strong barricades against the doors and win-