

wakening those tender and pungent emotions on account of sin which they have seen it to be blessed to feel, but which they have felt to be in danger of being smothered by a life of unbroken worldly indulgence or care or occupation.

Let none, then, think lightly of the practice of fasting, as if it were unimportant or unnecessary. Let it be seen that the heart in fasting is humbled and penitent, for otherwise our fasting will be hateful to God and injurious to ourselves; but this being attended to, let not the thing itself be regarded as supererogatory and uncalled-for. The minuter details of the practice, indeed, it may be impossible, as it would be unsubservient to any good purpose, to fix in all cases. Abstinence from all food, for example, it would not be proper to insist on in every instance; for in persons of weak constitutions this would be so far from tending to secure the ends of fasting that it would directly hinder them by rendering the person fasting unable to engage in the exercises calculated to attain them. For such persons it is altogether necessary to take a little food during their seasons of fasting, yet not for the gratification of animal appetite, but solely for the strengthening of their bodily frame; that the soul may thus be able to continue in humiliation, contrition and prayer. The importance of the thing itself, however, is not at all affected by such accommodations to special necessities; the duty and the blessedness of fasting, in its true scriptural sense, still stand upon their own grounds; and it may be for us solemnly to enquire, in these evil days on which we are fallen, whether the apostacy that prevails among many, and the low and declining state of religion too observable among

many others, may not in a great measure be owing to this, that the practice of fasting has fallen so much into disuse, if not into contempt. May it not be that through this disuse men, having nothing to break that soft and luxurious or uninterruptedly occupied life which is incompatible with godliness, have in multitudes of cases sunk either into continued surfeiting and drunkenness or into "cares of this life," heedless that because of these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience? We cannot disguise from our readers our strong conviction that it is for Christians in these times solemnly to consider whether if fasting, according to its scriptural idea, were more practised, the heart, instead of being wholly sensualized, as it often is, by unrestrained and uninterrupted animal indulgence or by ever-carking earthly anxieties might not be awakened to feel its own plagues and its awful degradation,—might not be made to see that one thing was yet more needful to it than the unbounded enlargement of its means of carnal gratification, and might not thus come back to God by supplication and fasting and weeping, instead of plunging recklessly, in the determined pursuit of a gain that will soon perish, into those "temptations and snares and foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition."

Fasting is to be either private or public;—private as in particular families, or more private still as in particular individuals—public is observed by a nation; or by a particular Church, or within a particular congregation. There is to be private fasting. Of this fasting, and of the most private kind of it—namely, of individuals sequestered from others, our Lord treats in the sixth chapter