

Family Reading.

"AND THE DOOR WAS SHUT."

REV. JOHN MAY.

Still is it open, that golden gate:
Night and day it is open to all;
The lily white vestment hangs in the hall:
Come to the wedding!—the hour is late.

The invitations have all gone forth;
The courts are ablaze with celestial light;
The jubilant guests stream in from the night,
Music, and dancing, and feast, and mirth!

Come to the wedding! The evening wanes.
Come, come away, ere it be too late:
See the bright bands troop in through the gate!
See the light flash on the crystal panes!

Circling around is the ruby cup:
Voices of welcome, and cries of delight;
Welcome to guests coming out of the Night,
Come, with the King and His Bride to sup!

Come to the Wedding with nimble foot—
Music, and dancing, and feast, and mirth,
Soon shall the ladder be drawn from Earth,
Drawn from the Earth, and the Door be shut.

Flashes the light on the emerald Shore,
Jasper and amethyst all aglow;
Hark to the gnashing of teeth Below!
Haste!—He is rising to shut the door.

THE LENTEN CALL.

The following is one of the many valuable tracts issued in the Church League Series, and which, with others appropriate to the season, we urge upon the attention of all who desire to improve the holy season of Lent.

A very wise man tells us that "to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." (Eccles. iii. 1-4). The world has been telling you long enough of the time to laugh and the time to dance: Let us say a few words of the time to weep and the time to mourn.

We must think of this some day; for there will come a day of weeping and great mourning, when "the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars," (Rev. xxi. 8), "and whose ever is not found written in the book of life, shall be cast into the lake of fire," (Rev. xx. 15). And such, I fear, are too many among ourselves. Alas! we cannot shut our eyes to the truth, that sin in every shape—open, shameless, notorious sin—hidden, secret, disguised sin—is around us and about us everywhere.

And is sin only about you? Is it not in you, in your very hearts, tempting you, seducing you, leading you farther and farther away from God, driving you deeper and deeper into recklessness and despair? Look out into the streets, look into your own homes, look into your own hearts, and there is the same ghastly, terrible, sickening sight—sin in every conceivable shape: drunkenness, fornication, adultery, thieving, lying, quarrelling, slandering, swearing, fighting, coveting, neglect of prayer, neglect of religion, neglect of God everywhere. And will not the Lord bring us to judgment for these things? Can we go on forever sinning, and not find that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 23)? "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. xviii. 4).

Lent, then, is the very season for thinking of these things. We should think of them, indeed, at all times; but since we are apt to forget them, the Church has for hundreds of years set apart this season of Lent for thinking specially of our sins, repenting of them, and praying God, for Jesus Christ's sake, to give us pardon and forgiveness. When the people of Israel were given up to idolatry and other grievous sins, Elijah spent forty days in the wilderness mourning over the wickedness of the people (1 Kings xix. 8-15). We want many Elijahs now, or surely heavier judgments will come upon us than ever came upon the Jews. As soon as our Blessed Lord had been baptised, He was

led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil, and all that time fasting and praying for us (S. Matt. iv. 1-11). Therefore, from very early times, forty days before Easter have been set apart by Christians, after the example of their Blessed Lord, for a time of special mourning and repentance for sin.

If, then, the Church so earnestly calls her own children, those who ought to be serving God, to repentance for their sins, how much more needful must it be for those who are living far away from God and every ordinance of religion. "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

Is it not well that you should have such a time as this to think of your spiritual state, to search and examine into your hearts, to consider your ways, to confess your sins, to seek pardon for, and grace to amend them, for the time to come? Is it not very good of your heavenly Father to give you such a season of repentance, to call you by this warning of His Voice, saying, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation," (2 Cor. vi. 2)?

Might He not have cut you off in your sins, without time to call for mercy or prepare for judgment? Will you use the time now that He gives it you? Will you try, during these six weeks, to learn about His ways, and seek that peace which your soul has so long craved in vain? The world and its pleasures, your work, your friends, your amusements, your family, yourself, have filled your mind and thoughts hitherto. Now, then, give a little time to God. *Six weeks.* Does that seem long? No, surely not, for the work of repentance, for turning to God, for saving our souls. Time for self-examination, time for prayer, time for good resolutions, and for putting those good resolutions into practice, time for breaking off sinful habits, and entering upon a course of holy living. Not too long for our weakness, not too short, with God's blessing, for the great end we should have in view.

You say, "We must work for ourselves and for our families; and God knows, with all our work, it is hard enough to put food into their mouths." We know it, dear brother or sister; we know it well, but give yourselves to God, and then He will bless your work to the profit of your souls as well as of your bodies. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things," (i.e., food, clothing, and necessities) "shall be added unto you." And after all, "what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (S. Matt. xvi. 26.) Have a care, then, for your soul, for if we care not for our souls in time, we must burn forever in hell-fire.

Begin, therefore, during Lent, if you have not begun before, to pray night and morning, examine yourselves every evening, read some portion of your Bible daily. Your clergy will give you some helps for daily prayer, and questions for self-examination. And with your prayers join some act of self-denial; Lent is a time of fasting as well as prayer. If your food is always so sparing that you cannot lessen it much in meat, lessen it in drink, think less about it, at least bear your want and poverty contentedly, in memory of our Blessed Lord's forty days' hunger in the wilderness.

And to prayer and self-denial add works of mercy and kindness to your neighbors. Remember even a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of Jesus shall not lose its reward. Give to others what you can deny yourselves; an act of kindness to a sick or helpless neighbour, making a bed, cleaning a room, washing out a few clothes, the sharing of a meal, or a fire, for Jesus' sake, that is, without hope of recompense, are actions which rejoice the holy Angels, and are well-pleasing to our Father in Heaven.

During Lent, too, you are specially invited to the services of the Church. There God's Word will be preached to you, not only on Sundays, but at other times as well; there you will be exhorted to the great work of repentance and conversion to God, there His great mercy will be set forth in receiving all true penitent sinners for the merits of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Come, then, and spend a Lent with us, a Lent of sorrow for sin, a Lent which may bring you to the Cross of Jesus Christ, and so prepare you for

the final resurrection, the glad Easter, of the last day.

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that now goeth on his way weeping and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him." (Ps. cxxvi. 6, 7).

BOGS.

During a series of meetings recently held in London we noticed a well-dressed lady who was a regular attendant at all the services. She always managed to get a seat in about the same position of the hall, near the platform. She was a most attentive listener. Day after day through three or four weeks we watched her. She had become a sort of fascination. One day we asked a lady who was on the platform in the choir seats if she knew her.

"Oh yes," was the reply; "very well."

"Is she a Christian?" was our next query.

"No," replied our informant, with an abrupt tone of voice, as if she did not care to say anything more about her; "she is a bog."

"A bog?" we repeated, not quite understanding what was meant.

"Yes," was the short, sharp reply; "a bog. Don't you know what a bog is?"

"Yes, I think I do," we replied. In our country, at least, it is a bit of marshy ground, or a stagnant pond which catches the surface-drainage of the surrounding country, but which has no outlet. It is usually covered with a green slime, and is the home of wild water-weeds and all sorts of reptiles.

"Well, that is what she is: she is a bog. She is found at all the religious meetings in London. She is a marsh; she has an unlimited capacity for hearing sermons and receiving all kinds of religious instruction, but she has no outlet. She is never known to do anything for Christ; she never speaks to a soul; she never gives to any cause, though she has money. She never does anything but just absorb, absorb, absorb! She is a bog. We have lots of them in London, and that is what we call them."—*Dr. Pentecost.*

WHY WE KEEP LENT.

I. For Christ's sake.

(a) He said that we should fast. (Luke v. 35, and Matt. vi. 16.)

(b) We follow him lovingly, although feebly and afar off, in His fast of forty days.

II. For the Church's sake.

(a) To maintain a custom early instituted and continuously followed in every branch of the Church; and which the experience of ages has proved to be most helpful.

(b) To pray with our Lord, and to work with Him, "That they all may be one." (S. John xvii: 21), and that all schisms may be healed.

III. For the World's sake.

(a) That by our quickened zeal and activity unbelievers may be convinced that we do try to follow the Crucified One.

(b) That our joy at the Feast of the Resurrection may be the more apparent to those "who have no hope, and are without God in the world." (Eph. ii: 12.)

IV. For our own sakes.

(a) To obey more closely the vows of renunciation, faith, and obedience, made when we were Baptized into the Body of Christ.

(b) To withdraw more fully from the world.

(c) To get a complete mastery over our tempers and appetites.

(d) To fight the Evil One.

PRAYER FOR OUR CHURCH AND PARISH.

O God, merciful and gracious, let Thy blessing rest upon the ministrations of the Church in this Parish, that all the members of it may become sound in the faith and holy in their lives; and may it please Thee to sanctify our Lenten efforts to Thy glory, and to our spiritual profit, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.