

true perception that things temporal are not worthy to be compared to things eternal; the assurance that it would be better to die than to lie; the conviction that it would be better to lose all worldly things than to profane God's name or to defile ourselves; these fragments of truth, that often float across our brains, would be rendered ours indeed, would become part of our fixed principles, part indeed of ourselves, if we would, instead of just letting them come and go, enter into that little room of which Christ spoke, and close the door as He says, and fix our minds for a short time earnestly on such ideas, and pray God to give us real and practical assurance and certainty about truth, and grace to live up to it, and faithfulness to that grace.—*Benson*

Parish and Family Reading.

For the Church Journal and Messenger.

TALKS AND STORIES ABOUT THE CALENDAR. LENT.

The darkness was just coming on. Annie had been writing a letter, and had not finished the fourth page before the sun had sunk behind the horizon, and had left her with her writing-desk still on her lap, and her pen in her hand, but unable to go on with the letter; partly because she could not think what to say next, and partly because it was too dark to see the lines on the paper. Some one knocked at the door, and Annie answered 'Come in.' She knew who it was, as the knock had been preceded by a stumble up the stairs, and that always signified that Fred was on his way.

'Annie,' said Fred, almost before he had fairly entered the room, 'let's go skating to-night. Will you? There's splendid skating on the pond, and a good many of the boys are going to be over there, and Fannie and Hattie Kelso, and Mame Morris, and ever so many others. It'll be no end to fun.'

'Yes indeed I will, if Papa has no objection. I have not had one really good skate this Winter, and here it is almost Spring again.'

'O! no it isn't. We have almost a whole month of Winter left. To-day is only the ninth of February.'

'Yes, I know that; but Lent coming so early this year, makes it seem nearer Spring than it is. Do you know that day after to-morrow is Ash-Wednesday?'

'Yes, and that makes me think. How is it, Sister Annie, that we tell what time Lent comes.'

'Let me see,' said Annie; 'it is something about the next Sunday after the full moon after the twenty-first of March, I think, but I am not sure. I'll look, and so saying she lighted the gas and turned to the first pages of her Prayer Book, to the 'Rules to know when the moveable feasts and holy days begin,' and read: 'Easter Day, on which the rest depend, is always the first Sunday after the full moon which happens upon or next after the twenty-first day of March; and if the full moon happen upon a Sunday, Easter Day is the Sunday after.' Now, Fred, just count forty days backwards, and you'll find out when Ash-Wednesday comes.'

'Yes, I see,' said Fred; 'but as I know it comes to-morrow, I won't count just now. I am much obliged to you, though, for telling me. I never know where to look for those things, as you do; and then you always have your Prayer Book, or any other book you happen to want, so handy that it isn't worth while to look for mine.'

Annie laughed and turned down the gas, and proposed that they should go down in the library and sit till it was supper time.

'Why! it's hardly dark here yet,' said Fred as he opened the door; 'how long the days are getting.'

'Yes they are. Did you know that the name Lent was taken from an old Saxon word that meant the Spring of the year, because the Lenten fast always happens about the beginning of Spring, or when the days are growing longer?'

'Is that so? I didn't know it.'

'Nor I,' said Nellie from behind the curtain, where she had been sitting unnoticed before by Annie and Fred. 'Sister Annie, what do we call the first day of Lent Ash-Wednesday for?'

'Wasn't it because the people in old times used to sprinkle ashes on their heads on that day in token of penitence?'

'Yes, and the ashes were the ashes of the palms and other evergreens burned on Palm Sunday of the year before. Wasn't that a curious custom? The primitive Christians used to commence their Lent on the Sunday which is now the first Sunday in Lent, but it was afterwards changed to the Wednesday before, as that made just forty days of fasting, and forty days is what it ought to be. You know that our Saviour was under the dominion of death about forty hours, and so we keep that number of days. I was reading somewhere the other day that Ash-Wednesday used to be called the "Head of the Fast".'

'There comes Papa,' said Nellie from her seat in the window, where she had been watching for him, and she ran out to meet him. In a moment more she came back triumphantly riding on her father's shoulder.

KATHARINE M. MARON.

THE DAY OF INTERCESSION.

JOEL II. 13.

It was the year of grace 1093. William Rufus was keeping Christmas at Gloucester Castle; a strong and spacious building, erected by his father on the eastern bank of the Severn, and often occupied by that monarch, as well as by his successor. It was past the hour at which the King usually received his councillors; and the royal ante-chamber was thronged by nobles and ecclesiastics of the highest rank. Many of these had arrived only on the previous day, their object being to present a petition to the King, on a subject which very nearly affected the welfare of the realm. The Earls of Northumberland, Shrewsbury, and Arundel; Hugh of Chester, easily distinguished by the great bulk of his frame and his commanding countenance; William de Warenne, Hugh de Grentmesnil, Roger de Lacy, and many others, were conferring together in different parts of the wide chamber. The stern gravity of their looks, and the earnest tones in which they conversed, showed that whatever might be the mission on which they had come, it was one of deep interest to them. The dress of nearly all present was rich and well fancied; for those were times in which rank was chiefly determined by its externals. Their caps, which they carried in their hands, were mostly of the most valuable furs, edged with gold and clasped with jewels. Their tunics were elaborately embroidered and of the finest materials; their girdles and sword-hilts of costly and artistic workmanship. But it was the younger nobles only who affected the peculiar foppiness of the day. These wore their hair long, parted down the middle of the head, and falling in ringlets over the shoulders—in some instances even lengthened by artificial curls. Their beards again were suffered to grow till they almost reached their girdles; and their shoes, puffed out with tow, terminated in points twisted to resemble the spires of a serpent; and were fastened by golden chains to their knees.

Besides the nobles, there were several Bishops present, as well as mitred Abbots: their dresses vying in magnificence with those of the laity. They wore their rich Episcopal robes and mitres illuminated with all the splendor of which art in those days was capable. They, too, discoursed with their neighbors with an earnestness which showed how deeply their feelings were engaged; but in general their demeanor evinced doubt and anxiety. One venerable old man, who was conversing with a stranger, a Teutonic knight—who had come, it was supposed, on a mission to the King from some foreign potentate—appeared to be even more depressed than his ecclesiastical brethren.

'Is it not past the usual hour of reception, my Lord Abbot?' inquired the foreigner. 'I was told that the King would expect our presence this morning at ten of the clock: methinks it must be long past that hour.'

'Yea, an hour and more,' returned the Abbot. 'But the King's hour of rising depends, too often, on whether he be fit to leave his bed or not. Yesterday having been one of the great feasts of the Church, I fear he tarried over the winecup even more than is his wont.'

'Is it his fashion so to keep the Christian festivals, my Lord?' inquired the other. 'Methinks the fathers of the Church would scarce approve of such a fashion.'

'Alas! he careth little for the voice of Holy Church,' returned the Abbot, 'or for any other voice either save that of his own will and pleasure. It hath been well said of him that he feared God but little, and man not at all.'

'Nay, the King hath risen, and had his morning meal,' said another ecclesiastic—a monk attached, as it appeared, to the royal household. 'My Lord Abbot doth not do him justice for once. He is engaged with his Chancellor, Ralph of Bayeux, on a matter of such moment that their conference is not yet broken up.'

'Ralph of Bayeux,' repeated the foreigner; 'I have heard of him, and of his favor with King William. Is he not a man of too mean rank to fill so high a station as that to which he hath attained?'

'The King careth but little for high or low,' returned the former speaker, 'so only they suit his purpose. And that, to do him justice, Ralph the Publican, as men are wont to call him—nay, do not fear, my Lord Serlo—no one, as I judge, can overhear our talk; and even were it otherwise, the King is so greatly feared, and so capricious in his mood, that there would be small fear of tales being carried to him. But "Ralph the Publican," as some style him, or "Ralph the Firebrand," as others have it, does his master's work effectually enough.'

'Of what work do you speak?' asked the German knight.

'The work of doing whatsoever King William may please, and bearing all the blame of it—so far as it is possible for another man to bear it; that is,' answered the monk, 'Master Ralph imposes fines on all holders of land, for any reason that may suggest itself to his fancy; or without a reason, if he can find none. He claims as the royal property, everything about which there has been any dispute; and if it should chance that there never hath been a dispute, he is clever at inventing one. He hath measured the whole realm after a new fashion of his own, making out that bad land should pay as large a tax as good—it being no fault of the King, as he avers, if the soil be bad; and therefore it is hard that he should lose by it. He summons the royal vassals to do military service, and then sends them back again on condition of their paying a certain sum to the King's exchequer. It is said that where the late King obtained one mark in the way of taxes, the present one, through Master Ralph's help, obtains at least two.'

'I marvel Englishmen endure it!' said his companion. 'From all I have ever heard respecting them, they are not men to allow themselves to be thus trampled on.'

'It may be they will not bear it,' interposed the Abbot Serlo. 'My brother here has not mentioned the heaviest wrongs which England has had to sustain; though, God knoweth, he hath spoken sad truths enough. The people of England have indeed suffered heavily in this generation as regards temporal matters. Their late sovereign chastised them with whips, but their present sovereign with scorpions. It hath been said with melancholy truth, that the one shors the fleece close to the skin, but the

other hath flayed off hide and all. The forest laws were enforced by the first William with stern severity, but by this second William with ruthless cruelty. The father was one who would win his way to his object through blood and fire; yet he would at times repent, and he kept some conscience towards God. But the son heeds neither God nor man, nor aught but his own lust. There was sin enough, heaven is witness, in the last generation; but never the open, unblushing, defiant wickedness which in the present day everywhere lifts its head. Yet, as I have already averred, even this is not the worst—'

'Methinks it should be, then, holy father,' interrupted the stranger; 'what worse than this can William himself have done?'

'He hath openly oppressed the Church, our Mother and his,' answered Serlo. 'He hath sacrilegiously appropriated to his own unholy uses, the revenues which pious men of old devoted to the service of God. Whosoever a bishopric or a rich abbacy is avoided by death or otherwise, he claims the temporalities, while the offices remain vacant; and then persistently refuses to make any appointment. Thus doth he retain in his own hands the dower of the Church: thus are men's souls starved and oppressed, as well as their bodies. It is now four years since Lanfranc of holy memory was called to his rest; and for all that time the flock of Christ in this land hath been without its chief shepherd.'

'Ay, I have heard of the death of Lanfranc,' said the German. 'He was in truth a man whose name was widely known. But report said that Anselm, the Prior of Bee, in Normandy, was designed as his successor. I had even heard that he had journeyed over from Normandy for that special purpose.'

'There was such a rumor,' returned the Abbot, 'but it was a mistaken one. Anselm came to England with no such purpose; but in answer to the summons of the Earl of Clester, who earnestly desired his presence. Many have thought, as thou dost, that he is marked out as the successor of Lanfranc; but neither himself nor the King are among the number. Nay, the very rumor hath sorely disturbed both of them: and while Anselm is anxious to quit England as speedily as may be, and so put a stop to the gossip which connects his name with the Archbishopric—the King, out of mere ill-will, will not suffer him to depart.'

'And where is he now abiding?' asked the Teutonic knight.

'He is my guest,' said Serlo, 'and hath been so for many weeks past. But touching the vacant Archbishopric—'

He was interrupted by the entrance of the royal chamberlains, who threw open the doors of the reception hall, announcing that the King was now prepared to give audience to his nobles. They entered accordingly, the Bishops, preceded by their cross-bearers, leading the way, the nobles and knights following in a dense throng, which half-filled the chamber, spacious as it was.

Rufus, who at all times affected great state, and on the present occasion, perhaps, felt the policy of employing it—was seated on the dais at the further end, under a canopy of gold with velvet hangings. The throne he filled was of bronze, carved with all the skill which the age could furnish, and adorned with gilding. He was a man strongly made, about the middle height, with features which would have been handsome and pleasing, but for the traces of coarse debauchery, and unrestrained indulgence of passion, which were plainly to be read upon them. His light sandy hair was surmounted by an open crown of gold, adorned with fleurs-de-lys. On his right hand was stationed the favorite minister, in whose dispraise the monk had spoken so warmly—Ralph of Bayeux—subsequently Bishop of Durham, but at present simply the King's favorite minister and treasurer. News had that morning been received from the Welsh marches, of successes gained against the inhabitants of those parts by the Lord Fitz-hamo; which was highly gratifying to William. He had deferred the audience solicited by the Bishops and nobles, in order that he might learn all the particulars of Fitz-hamo's despatches, and discuss them with Flambard. The result had been so satisfactory, that Rufus was now in his most agreeable mood, and received the deputation with unusual courtesy.

'Ye are welcome, my Lords. Welcome, my Lords of Winchester and Lincoln. Welcome, Arundel, De Lacy, De Warenne. It grieves me to have detained ye so long in the ante-chamber, but there were matters of moment, which could not be set aside. I have leisure now to hear you. What is the petition, which, as I learn, you are anxious to present to me?'

He glanced round the circle, as if looking for the person who was to be spokesman for the others. There was an embarrassed pause; and then the senior Bishop present began in a tone and manner which evinced that he had but little pleasure in executing his errand. 'My Liege, your loyal and dutiful subjects approach your person with every sentiment of reverence and duty, nothing doubting that you will be pleased to give a gracious attention to their petition; which the evils, from which this realm is now suffering, induce them to make.'

He paused, and the King replied in a tone for him unwontedly mild. 'Proceed, my Lord; what be these evils, of which ye complain?'

'I am desired to remind your Grace,' resumed the Bishop, 'that it is now four years since the late Archbishop of Canterbury, the pious Lanfranc, was taken from us; and since then—' he stammered and hesitated, for the pleasant expression had now altogether vanished from the King's face, to which a dark red flush had mounted—'since then, the Church hath been as a widow—as a widow—who—'

'As a widow who is desirous of espousing another husband, thou wouldst say,' suggested the King. 'What, know you not, my Lord Bishop, that the Church, following Paul, ever honors those "who are widows indeed," as he hath it; that is, who sorrow too truly for their lost husbands, to desire to replace them?'

'Your Grace is pleased to jest,' faltered the Bishop, 'nevertheless if I—'

'Jest!' repeated William, more angrily than before. 'By the holy Face, I swear the jest will be an evil one