

# THE CANADIAN CHURCH MAGAZINE

◦ ◦ AND MISSION NEWS ◦ ◦

*Published by the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada.*

Vol. XII.

TORONTO, MARCH, 1898.

No. 141

## LENT.

**H**OSE who have made no personal use of the regularly recurring seasons of the Christian year, are apt to regard them as artificial and involving something like insincerity. "How," they ask, "can you make yourselves genuinely miserable just because you have come to Ash Wednesday, when possibly you may have that day inherited a fortune; or how can you pretend to be jubilantly happy on Easter Day, when perhaps your wife is lying dead in her chamber?" Obviously, this objection is not wholly unreasonable; and there are customary solemnities to which it might apply with great force. Suppose, for instance, a great drought or blizzard, or a deluge of persistent rainstorm had desolated a whole State, what could possibly be the significance of the Office of Thanksgiving Day? But the regular seasons of the Christian year have an altogether different significance. Easter, for instance, is the commemoration of a fact in history, altogether independent of our moods of mind or immediate surroundings. That a man's wife is lying dead in her chamber does not alter the fact that "Christ is risen." Nay, that fact is the one supreme consolation that may raise him above his personal sorrow, and help him to see the meaning and, after a while, the possible blessing of it. And the coming into possession of a fortune, though it is not likely to make a man miserable, ought to make him sensible to the extreme importance of self-restraint, of calmest consideration, of an accurate estimate of his new responsibilities, and of the fact that wealth and the opportunities of self-indulgence, are a "burden of the Lord."

Lent is near at hand. What, after all, is the spiritual significance of it. It is not a mere scenic imitation of our Lord's fasting "forty days and forty nights." In these western and northern regions of the world, such exact imitation is physically impossible. What we should call fasting in the United States, is the normal condition of Eastern or tropical climates. The ordinary habits of such regions would be death to the American. Therefore, perhaps—but at any rate, certainly—the Protestant Episcopal church has laid

down no minute rules or dietary for the season of Lent. It is physiologically certain that rigorous fasting, or even abstinence from meat would render a great majority of Americans absolutely incapable of unusual acts and exercises of devotion. And if fish, for instance, be substituted for "flesh," everybody knows that a rich man can live as luxuriously in Lent as during Eastertide. His Lent would differ from Eastertide only in being very much more hypocritical and ruinous to the soul. Moreover, self-indulgence lies in very many different directions. How could any hard and fast rules about diet have the same significance for a society man and a vegetarian?

The real significance of Lent is self-denial. It is no self-denial for a millionaire to give \$1,000 to a missionary society or a hospital. To give \$10 to either, might, for a clerk at \$50 a month, with wife and children, be next to a mortal sin. But nearly everybody knows that he is allowing himself in many indulgences which though generally harmless, may in time make a slave of him. He hardly knows whether this be so or not until he makes the experiment: Can I do without them? It is absolutely essential, not only for the religious life, but for any truly noble life, that a man should have perfect command of himself. If he cannot give up his wine, or his cigars, or his regular courses at dinner, or his amusements—supposing these things to be lawful in themselves—he is a slave to these indulgences, and being a slave to them, "he cannot serve two masters." Lent comes to everybody, then, with this question: "Are you so far your own master that you can devote yourself utterly to God?" Nobody can pretend that this question is irrelevant.

And as to unusual acts and exercises of devotion, they may be made merely formal and insincere. But does anybody seriously pretend that, if engaged in with a true heart and Christian spirit, they are injurious, or even unnecessary? Do Christian people give too much time to devotion or religious instruction? If religion be of serious importance, do people generally get too much of it, or devote too much time to it? Does anybody seriously pretend that one Sunday service a week is spiritually sufficient? We do