

treasury of merit to cancel sin or recommend us to God, it must be severely condemned. Fasting, as an aid to holiness, has Scriptural sanction. Fasting, as a merit in itself, is an absurd idea—as absurd as to think of scourging or the mutilations of one's body as a merit. And yet, in the minds of many church people to-day, fasting and merit seem to be indissolubly linked.

Finally, it will be said that people attend church oftener and more regularly in Lent than at other times. Here we reach higher ground. The Church of England, by more frequent and solemn services, and by many a solemn call from the pulpit, extends to its members every aid in making the whole period a time of earnest self-examination and communion with God. But here, too, we must be on our guard. As with fasting so with churchgoing, the mere act is apt to be taken as meritorious. People attend daily service often as a Lenten practice, and then count up the number of services as so much merit placed to their credit.

THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF LENT — If we take the trouble to examine the collects and epistles and gospels for Lent, we shall find that they have the nature of a personal appeal, and that they bring forward matters of very deep and serious import. The beautiful collect for Ash Wednesday strikes the keynote: "Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness." We do more than commemorate the forty days' fast of Jesus. That is the least part of it. We recall these forty days when Jesus, by the will of God, was subjected to the fiercest temptations of the devil, and withstood them. Starving in body, cut off from all human sympathy, alone in the wilderness, He was met by the devil at a time when human liability to temptation would be greatest. The propositions of Satan took every advantage of His apparently desperate condition, and yet Jesus was the victor. The material and the carnal had no power over him. Temporal advantage failed to seduce Him. He knew only one line of action—the will of God.

And so the appeal comes to us every Lent to gird up our loins and prepare to overcome the evil one as our Lord set us the example. We are reminded that life is no easy course. Evil meets us at every turn, Satan dogs our footsteps, and we are

being constantly vanquished. The material and the carnal, the temporal and the agreeable, triumph over the eternal, and we are the poor tools of Satan. It's a time for arousing ourselves and measuring our strength with the enemy. We are to let all distractions be cast aside, and all that has "sore let and hindered" us in the past. The time calls for a mighty effort, relying on Him who went through the struggle and was the victor. The church's hope is that we may so use the opportunities of the season that when it is past we may be found, not drifting hopelessly down the river of evil, but anchored firmly by faith to Jesus Christ; no longer vanquished by Satan, but conquerors through Him who loved us.

Other religious bodies have at intervals their religious revivals, but the observance of Lent furnishes us with an annual one—a time for shaking off easy-going ways and all that is conventional in religion, and, by withdrawing from worldly pursuits, grappling as mortal, perishing souls with the problem of our salvation, or renewing our strength in Him in whom are all our fresh springs.

PRACTICAL HINTS FOR THE SEASON. — It is a fact borne out by experience that customs and practices generally observed, however meaningless and even foolish they may have grown in time, rest upon some truth, or fragment of truth, or point to some original good purpose which has long since been distorted or covered up. So it is with many of our Lenten practices to-day. Though but formally and mechanically followed by many, they really stand for eternal truth, and it is for us to unearth and emphasize the truth, and prevent the travesty upon it. The customary cessation from social functions and the round of winter gaiety during the forty days of Lent, as commonly practised, is certainly a mockery of religion. Unwillingly, regretfully, many withdraw. The heart is not in the act. It is wrung from them by custom or the imagined sanctity of Lent, as if it were another Sabbath ordained of God. If they dared, perhaps, they would not observe it at all, and this is called self-denial, and is viewed as meritorious. Nay, to some the greater the desire to disregard Lent the greater the virtue involved in observing it. And yet sin, we know, is not in the act, but in the heart, out of which the act proceeds. The man who would steal, if he dared, is a thief, and the man or woman who is held down to keep Lent doesn't keep it. Even

if the retirement were with a willing heart, it has no merit in itself. What, then, is the great truth lurking? It is this. Lent is a season specially observed for religious self-examination and spiritual refreshing—a time for drawing closer to God and drinking great draughts of His Spirit, so as to fan our spiritual life, ever prone to relax, into a fierce flame and strengthen every moral fibre. We surely need these times of periodic refreshing; and a total withdrawal from the world is the greatest help in the furtherance of these—nay, it is imperative. To draw near to God, we must not be distracted by social duties or much-coveted pleasures. We want unbroken communion with God. Let us therefore try to make this Lent such a time of spiritual refreshing; otherwise to live "quietly" for forty days is of very little account—a mere prudential act.

Again, under the custom of abstaining from foods and delicacies there may lie a very noble purpose. But it must be more than abstaining for its own sake. Simply to eat less is as foolish as to sleep less or to put on less, except it be for reasons of health, or to chastise a greedy appetite. The self-denial of it is at best insignificant. Otherwise the monks are right. The self-denial of Christ is a far nobler thing. It is always for a purpose. His self-sacrifice was for the salvation of sinful men. "Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich." And to be like Christ our self-denial must be to benefit another, or advance, in some way, His cause.

What an opportunity is given to us in Lent to work in His Spirit! Take the cause of missions alone. Would that our church people denied themselves vigorously every Lent—food, clothing, delicacies, privileges of all kinds—and gave their savings in money to the mission work of the church! What millions would flow into the coffers of missionary societies! How the work might be extended! There is an object for people to put before them—*fasting and self-denial in aid of the Gospel for those without it!* It would put an end to the miserable casuistry of fasting, and secure millions of dollars for the noblest of causes. It's not the bare necessities of living that cost. It's the many privileges, and treats, and delicacies that people allow themselves. One Lenten season of such fasting would make the usual contributions of the church for missions sink into utter insignificance. And surely those people who believe it impera-