

Proclamation appointing, and we do hereby appoint Wednesday, the eighteenth day of April next, to be observed throughout our said Province as a day of General Fast and Humiliation and of Prayer to Almighty God for the success of our arms in the said war. And we do hereby earnestly exhort all our loving subjects in our said Province reverentially and devoutly to observe the same as a day of general fast, humiliation and prayer."

We accept the exhortation of our gracious Sovereign, and here meet for the solemn purposes of prayer and meditation. I know not whether anything more than this be really intended by the proclamation; for we are all aware how long the antiquated forms of words cling to state documents after the progress of events has shaken their original and proper meaning out of them. The letter of the proclamation exhorts us to "fast." If by this is really meant an abstinence from our usual daily food, I must say that, for my own part, I cannot yield to the exhortation, and shall not practise any such abstinence. The life of our religion is well nigh burdened to death in our day by shams and hypocrisies of various sorts, and if my humble voice could be heard in high places, it would remind our rulers to have a care lest, in conforming their documents too closely to antiquated formulas, they may not be helping to perpetuate in our nation the iniquity of religious insincerity.* If by the exhortation to "humi-

* The preacher has here assumed that fasting in the ordinary dictionary sense was not generally practised — in fact, was hardly intended — on the day appointed for the "fast." In this assumption he may be wrong; but it was based on the idea that the practice of fasting, if not all real faith in it, had departed almost wholly from all classes of the people. Very few Protestants even pretend to observe it, and as for the Catholics, their practice commonly amounts to little more than a variation of diet, or change of cookery. Under such circumstances, if the Proclamation had omitted mention of such an observance, would it not have been a more sincere document, and therefore more truly religious in its conception and purpose?