

ing torchlight between the bright rays of Epiphany-tide and the dark hours of Lenten retreat and silence.—*Church Calendar.*

Septuagesima, Sexagesima and Quinquagesima, the seventieth, sixtieth and fiftieth day before Easter, or the three Sundays before Ash Wednesday, and the weeks intervening, have well been termed the porch by which we approach the solemn Lenten-tide, and in which we are bidden to linger for a little while to prepare our thoughts and frame our minds for a proper entrance upon of the Holy Season.

GRACE AT MEALS.

"Blessing the table," says Collier, in his *Sacred Interpreter*, "or saying grace, which is the craving a blessing from God on our food, and thanksgiving afterwards, is a necessary and Christian-like practice, encouraged by St. Paul, who has taught us that 'every creature of God is good, if it be received with thanksgiving.'" Our Lord, when about to feed the multitude, took the loaves and fishes and "looking up to Heaven, He blessed them." The custom of saying grace at meals prevailed among the Jews, and has always been practiced by Christians. Even the heathen poured out libations to the gods, at their feasts. "The contrary practice," says Collier, "of devouring creatures which God has made and treasured for our use, and by whose blessing it is that we are nourished and refreshed by them, without even looking up to Heaven for a blessing, or returning thanks for them, is most indecent, unchristian, atheistical."

Is it possible that in any families professedly Christian this simple and seemly practice is neglected? If so, let it be instituted this New Year time. Let some member of the family be appointed, beforehand, to ask a blessing, and some one to return thanks. At dinner, at least, this devout custom should be observed. If other meals are irregular and informal, a blessing may be asked when even two or three are gathered; and even at a solitary meal every Christian should utter a silent prayer. Nothing can excuse the neglect of "saying grace" at the family board. The head of the house is, of course, the proper person to do this, and even a Bishop, if present, would not assume the office unless invited to do so. But the duty may be delegated to any member of the household, and it is sometimes performed by a child. Nothing could be more beautiful and appropriate than a short invocation of God's blessing upon the repast, by a little child. The influence of such an act of faith upon every member of the family must extend over the whole day. We subjoin some forms in common use, giving the preference to the responsive grace on occasions when the whole family are assembled:

BEFORE MEALS.

Bless, Heavenly Father, the gifts of Thy bounty which we are about to receive, and pardon our sins, through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Accept our thanks, Heavenly Father, for these Thy gifts, and bless them to our use, for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

God be merciful unto us and bless us in receiving our daily bread, for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

AFTER MEALS.

For these and all His mercies, God's Holy Name be praised, through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Unto God the Giver of all good gifts, be thanks and praise for these and all His mercies, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

AN INDIAN'S PRACTICAL TEST.

A Christian trader (Mr. Thomas), thus relates an incident which was the turning point in his career as an Indian trader. He said: The Indians' land east of the Mississippi had already been ceded to the Government by treaty, and the red man only dwelt there by the consent of the Government. When the Indians went away I went with them; I took up my quarters at the head waters of the Wisseba, at the junction of two important streams, tributaries to the great father of waters, and opened my store for trade.

After exposing my goods, in all their Indian varieties for some days without any success in selling, I became almost discouraged, and nearly concluded to give it up. The Indians would come into my store by the dozens, and after examining my goods, go away without purchasing. They had plenty of shu-ne-ah (money) and furs, but bought no goods, and the reason was a mystery to me.

At length the chief of the nation came in company with a crowd of Indians. He instantly exclaimed, "How do, Thomas? Come, show me nice goods. What do you ask for this? I'll take four yards of calico—three coon skins for one yard—half a dollar exactly—by'm by, to-morrow, I'll pay you."

The next day he came, accompanied by his whole band. His blanket above his waist was stuffed with coon skins. "Longknife, I will pay that bill now," said the Indian.

Suiting the action to the word, he began to pull the skins from his blanket, and counting out twelve held the thirteenth in his hand, and finally laid it upon the rest, exclaiming, "That's it exactly." I gave it back to him, telling him he owed me but twelve, and the Great Spirit would not let me cheat him. We continued to pass it back and forth, each one asserting that it belonged to the other. At last he appeared satisfied, and gave me a scrutinizing look; then placing the skin within the folds of his blanket, he stepped to the door, and with a yell cried, "Come!—come in, all you, and trade with the pale face—he's honest—he will not cheat the Indian, he believes in the Great Spirit—his heart is big, he is an honest trader."

He then turned to me and said, "If you had taken that one coon skin, I and my people would have had nothing to do with you, and would have driven you away like a dog; but now I have found that you are the Indian's friend, and we shall be yours."

The Indians then began flocking into the store and to trade, and before the sun had gone down, I was waist deep in furs, and shu-ne-ah in plenty. That one coon skin saved me as a trader, and I was thus even in my extremity enabled to honor Christ as my Saviour, my Counsellor and Guide.

BAD THOUGHTS.

Bad thoughts, if cherished, blight virtue, destroy purity, and undermine the stablest foundations of character. They are like rot in timber: like rust in iron. They eat into the man. And when the process has gone on for a while, and there comes the stress of an outward temptation, down they go into a mass of ruins! Ships go out to sea, all bright with fresh paint, their sails all spread and streamer flying, and never come back—never reach port. Why? They met a storm and went down, because they were rotten. Under the paint was decay! Just so bad thoughts, vile, impure thoughts and imaginations, rot the manly oak of character, rust the iron of principle, slacken all the stays of virtue, and leave the man or woman to the violence of temptation, with no interior reserve power to withstand the shock. Bad thoughts fed and fattened are the bottom vice of society.

A TAME RAT.

I have not for the last twenty years been without a tame rat. The "monkey room" is the general refuge for the sick animals belonging to my friends, and lucky are those animals who come into this hospital. I almost forget where the rat I am writing about came from. I believe he was one I rescued from an untimely end by being swallowed by the ant-eater at the Zoological Gardens. This rat has the bump of curiosity strongly developed, and nothing pleases him so much as to make an inspection of my writing table. He creeps cautiously about and examines everything, his object being to steal. What he likes best is lump sugar. My sugar-basin originally cost a penny; like the Portland vase, it has been smashed and broken so often that it is impossible to estimate its present value. The cause of these numerous fractures is the rat, who, when he wants a bit of sugar, stands upon his hind legs, supporting himself with his tail in a tripod-like fashion, and upsets the sugar-

basin; then, selecting a lump, he bolts with it. It is a remarkable fact that the rat never eats in the open; he takes all he steals back to his house. In order to do this he has to get on to the mantle-piece, which is about eighteen inches above the writing table. To enable him to accomplish this, I have put up for him a rat-ladder, built somewhat on the lines of a salmon ladder. After I had shown him once or twice how to get up this ladder with objects, which for a rat must be of considerable weight. One day I saw him steal a whole red herring. Having tried the best way to carry it, he ultimately picked it up at the right point where it balanced. When he arrived at the round hole which leads to the sleeping compartment of the squirrel's cage, he was pulled up short by the herring, which was crossways in his mouth. I was curious to see what he would do. He dropped the herring and seemed to consider. Having quickly made up his mind he adopted the following plan. Leaving the herring outside he went into the hole, and turning short around seized it by the head, and hauled it in with the greatest ease. The muscles about the neck of the rat are very strong, giving him great power to use his wedge-shaped head, whether for boring or carrying. He uses his tail to steer himself, and when climbing, works as a rope-dancer works his balancing-pole.

The rat is a great stealer of bits of paper, and any loose pieces he can find he carries away. When the post comes in, in the morning, therefore, the rat has the envelopes as a perquisite. These he tears into little bits and makes a very comfortable nest with them.—*Buckland's Settings from Animal Life.*

A DOG'S TESTIMONY.

Many of the children who read these lines have heard or seen the beautiful passage on prayer to be found in Tennyson's poem called "Morte d'Arthur"—the death of Arthur. The extract is in these words:—

"For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
For so the whole round world is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

I have been reminded of these lines, and especially of the opening allusion to the prayerless brutes because I know an individual possessed of a dog whose behavior has sometimes illustrated the poet's meaning. The little dog in question is of no ancestral or other distinction; comes of no fine breed; and labors under the disadvantage of being yellow—a fine thing for a lion (in which case the color would be called "t' wdy"); but always regarded as a very bad feature in a dog. Now, this small animal, notwithstanding his humble origin and his disgraceful color, is so intelligent, so faithful, and especially so affectionate a creature, that sometimes one might almost think he possessed something similar to a human soul. But the little dog showed at other times and in other ways, the vast distance that separated him from the humblest human being.

More than once Jack (that is his name) has made his way into the room where his master was at prayer, kneeling, and with his eyes closed. At such times Jack has been distressed and frightened beyond all words at the sight. He always whined and cried almost like a child, and thrust his nose against the quiet figure, and tried to disturb it and arouse it. Evidently the animal did not know what to make of the position of prayer. If he had any idea at all, it was that the person praying was dead.

There are times in which prayer is scoffed at in so many ways, that it may do good to remind the children that it constitutes one point of difference between the brute creation and the human race. It is the high privilege of men to pray—it is one of the marks of their divine birth and of their eternal destiny. It is well enough that dogs and other dumb beasts should not understand and should object to it; but who wants to get his ideas of things from a dog's opinion and example?

"Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross daily, and follow Me."