

# The Church Guardian,

A Weekly Newspaper published in the interests of the Church of England.

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## LENT.

I.

LENT is the Church's Revival. Not spasmodically and at long intervals, but regularly and every year, does the Church of the living God call her children to self-examination, fasting and prayer. Not by the persistent inculcation of one single dogma to the exclusion of all the others; not by exciting and frightening sinners into a so-called conversion does she strive to bring them to God. But rather she would win them; by leading them to a suitable frame of mind induced by self-denial and quiet thought; by the exhibition of Christ suffering, dying, rising again. The season of Lent is the grand and sublime climax of the drama of Redemption, which it is the office of the Church perpetually to rehearse until the Lord come again. And as we should naturally behold the closing scenes of some great Tragedy of earth with bent head and bated breath; so do we look upon the picture of the last days of the Saviour's life with an emotion that shews itself, not in noise of words, but in silence of thought.

1. BUT LENT MUST BE A REALITY. If the season only add another to the list of religious shams, it had better be abolished. There is too much tendency to play at Lent. It is pleasant to feel that we are keeping in a certain sense a season of the Church which it is rather the fashion now to observe. It brings to the mind a kind of satisfaction if we go to the special Lenten services once in the week; or sigh over the specially fervent appeals which are sure to be made to us to endeavour to deny ourselves. But there are two dangers under which we shall surely labour. The first is *unreality*. We cannot be real, unless we are in earnest, and unless we are resolute in self-examination. None can overcome a sin, until he first find out what that sin is. And there are none so blind as those who will not see. No one capable of thought can be ignorant of what his besetting sin is. But no one at all can gain one step in the onward course till he honestly and fairly look his sin in the face; see where it is leading him; see what effect it has on others, as well as on himself. And one peculiar benefit of the Lenten season is that it not only provides a calm retreat for the soul, wherein it may "come apart into a desert place and rest awhile;" but it actually predisposes to the work, it holds out every incentive to it, it exhibits a glorious and perfect example before it. Doubtless St. Paul strikes the key-note when he says "I keep under my body." The improvement must always be in the direction of self-restraint, both of spirit and body. Be real then in this

necessary discipline. *Look your sin full in the face*, and in the power of God and by the help of Christ, make a stand against it. Do not allow yourself to "appear to men to fast." Talk not about how you keep Lent, or how any one else observes it. But keep it yourself. If sloth beset you, get up half an hour earlier every morning. If anger, try to be silent under provocation. If self-will, do something against inclination every day. Give up some lawful pleasure, some dearly loved luxury, some specially precious pastime, and take the time or the money for work for God. Those who now live poorly cannot give up much in the shape of food, but there lies always open to every one that greatest pleasure in life, the luxury of doing good to others, that trait which is in the human of all things nearest to the Divine—sympathy. Above all things *be real*.

2. Next—PERSEVERANCE. Many persons begin Lent with holy resolutions and earnest prayers. The Devil's temptations to doubt have been driven away. The world's allurements have been pushed aside, and for a while a veil has been drawn around the soul, and daily it has approached nearer to its God. It has acknowledged that of itself it could do no good thing, neither form nor keep a single good resolve, and for a while it was steadfast and careful. But after a time there was a falling off. The discipline too long endured became irksome, gradually the hours of devotion were shortened, and the tension of the soul was loosed, and by the time of the week of the Lord's Passion, almost all interest in the same had been lost. There is nothing the Evil One dreads so much for those who would live to God as perseverance. He does not mind a good beginning, if only he can prevent the "enduring unto the end." He knows the power for good in one resolution kept unbroken. Beware of the temptation which will surely come to relax your efforts, to cease attention on your services, to slacken in your sympathy, to deaden your devotions, and to chill your charity. You will most certainly be exposed to it. You need not hope to escape. Do not begin with a harder rule than you can reasonably hope to maintain. Each Sunday will come to you as a rest and a refreshment. The wells of living water are there for your use. And as each Lord's Day comes with its holy lessons of faith, and hope, and love, you will arise in the strength of that meat unto Horeb, the mount of God.

Here then are the two points on which everything will depend as to your right use of the season of Lent. You will naturally make a rule for yourselves at the beginning. What can I give up for Christ's sake? What thing that is lawful to me can I deny myself in for the sake of God and His Church? How best can I make this holy season profitable to my soul? What services can I attend? What work of charity and love can I engage in? I must not undertake more than I can carry out; but my Lent this year must be a reality. I must no longer treat it as a plaything, but must strive to go forward, putting on the whole armour of God, that I may be able in the evil day to stand. Every one can add to the morning and evening prayer which will be offered in the Church throughout the season the Collect out of the Communion Service, and say the 51st Psalm kneeling, on the Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent, and many who have leisure can do much more.

Remember, every soul is nearer to Heaven or nearer to Hell at the end than at the beginning of this Lent.

"CHOOSE YE THIS DAY WHOM YE WILL SERVE."

## THE PSEUDO-ISIDOREAN DECRETALS.

THE October number of the *American Church Review* gives us an analysis of "the Forged Decretals," founded on a very searching examination of them by a German writer, Paulus Heinschius. Perhaps our readers would like to know more than they do about this wonderful document, upon which the whole of the claims of the Papacy from the 9th century have been based. It was a very clever man, whoever he was, who conceived and carried out the idea of placing, by forgery, the Bishops of the Latin Church, and through them, the throne of St. Peter, above those of all the rest of the Apostles; and of making Christendom for centuries believe that his throne was fixed in Rome. This was done by one who, in all likelihood, will remain unknown to the end of time. His name has never been revealed, but the power of his work still exists. The false Decretals were compiled sometime in the 9th century, in all probability by an ecclesiastic of the Gallican or Spanish Church, and the writer commenced by forging the name of a famous Bishop of great authority in the Western Church, Isidore of Seville, calling himself in his preface Isidore Mercator. So thoroughly and, we believe, honestly, was this document accepted by the Church of Rome in general, in a day when careful investigation was well nigh impossible, that the Decretals were for centuries believed to be based upon a letter written by Anacletus, Bishop of Rome, about A. D. 98. In the 12th century, Gratian, a Benedictine Monk, worked, it is said, for 24 years at the attempt to reconcile all the decrees of the Church previously proclaimed, and succeeded so well that, with the help of the "False Decretals," he published his *Concordantia Discordantium Canonum* (or Reconciliation of Discordant Laws) which has ever since been mainly the law of Roman Christianity. From this source the Forged Decretals have, as the writer in the A. C. R. observes, "been securely transferred to a code which has passed into the very existence of the Roman Curia. The "Forged Decretals," in fact, are composed of (1) spurious letters of early Popes; (2) a late edition of the Hispania, or Spanish collection of Canons, Decretals, &c., which had previously been falsely named after Isidore, of Seville, as their supposed compiler. These had been pretty generally received throughout the Western Church about the close of the 6th century, whereas Isidore, of Seville, died in A. D. 636. (3) Extracts, mostly very brief, but all to the same purpose, from utterances of late Popes and decrees of late councils, but all professing to be the utterances of early Bishops of Rome and decrees of early councils, and all, in fact, contradicting what such Bishops and such councils had uttered and decreed; and (4) the "Forged Decretals" are forgeries of a very high order, such as would put to shame for *clumsiness* the commercial forgeries of our latter days. For professing to proceed from Apostles and their immediate successors, they quote the words of men who lived at different periods, and at various distances from the Apostolic times, down to the time of the compiler, and Canons of Councils which were never passed; and when quotation will not serve the turn of the compiler, he freely resorts to his imagination. Still in usual he is careful to quote the words of *some* author; but, as it seems, it does not matter at all to him in what century previous to his own the author lived. Any words which serve his turn are pressed into the service, and any and all are incorporated by Gratian without scruple and without