

INCIPIENT MARIOLATRY

SIR.—In Mr. Wood's letter he objects to the line in Hymns Ancient and Modern, "Shall we not love thee, Mother dear," on the ground that it tends to Mariolatry. Such an idea from the use of a poetic apostrophe would be too ridiculous to entertain for a moment, were it not for the fact that Mariolatry has been, and is practised in the Roman Communion. This alone gives the slightest colour of pretence for any possible objection to the line referred to. But as the "Bible is the religion of Protestants," what shall we say to the inspired writer of the 148th Psalm? Whatever may have been the age in which he lived, that writer had on the east of him multitudes who worshipped the sun as God, and on the west of him whole nations who worshipped as Divinities beasts and creeping things. And yet that inspired writer presumes to invoke *the sun and moon, the stars of light, the heaven of heavens, fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy wind, mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowls!* Can Mr. Wood point out the difference in principle between this *daring* apostrophe of the Psalmist and the line to which he objects? I fear that if he had lived at the time of the Annunciation he would have accused the Angel Gabriel also of Mariolatry! The teaching of the Church where Mr. Wood heard the line he objects to must have been sadly colourless, or he would scarcely have fallen into the error contained in his letter.

Yours,
R. JOHNSON.

Family Reading.

GOD'S FLOWERS UPON GOD'S ALTAR.

"T is "of Thine own we give Thee," gracious God!
Flowers of the spring-time, offerings from the soil,
Tinted by Thine own hand with rainbow dyes,
Or with the gold and blue of sunset skies,
Of all earth's boundless gifts, to Thee we bring
Nought that is holier as an offering.

Oh! glorious symbols of the Easter morn,
Out of decay and death and darkness born,
Springing to light and life from out the tomb
Of nature's desolation, sadness, gloom;
Ye come, sweet flowers, with fragrance pure and rare
To blend your incense with the breath of prayer.

Christ hath arisen "with healing in His wings,"
Ye have arisen, oh, bright and beautiful things,
To tell us of that resurrection morn,
When we immortal, from the grave new-born,
With bodies glorified, to life shall rise,
And meet the Saviour in the bending skies.

PREPARATION FOR SUNDAY.

A GOOD RESOLUTION TO MAKE AND KEEP. ADDRESSED
TO ALL CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

It is not difficult to see that many great Christian verities are imperilled just now; and, in truth, it is hard to say what part of Christianity is not in peril. Let none take refuge by saying that Christ will never leave or forsake His Church. He never will. But He has allowed portions of that Church to fall into great feebleness, and to decay. Where are the Churches of Asia Minor, to whose "Angels" Jesus sent an admonitory letter? Where the Churches founded by St. Paul in Asia and Europe? It is no safety from peril that England was once religious.

Amongst other dangers, the Lord's Day is in very great peril of being forgotten. The Bishop of Liverpool's tract on this subject might be perused, with very great benefit by many Christian people, for it shows how important a benefit and privilege the Lord's Day is, and demonstrates the Divine institution of it until the end of time. There is a practical view which Christians might easily take upon this subject, which, if carried into effect, would do more to secure a due, *i.e.* a calm, restful, and holy observance of the day, than all legislation together. The days, indeed, of legislation about things religious are over. This is probably very greatly to be regretted. But without disputing the question, the fact is beyond dispute. The day is nearly come when God's Church will have to stand alone awhile; and mankind will take sides either with her or against her.

Now, there are many well-planned and successful efforts constantly made to promote half-holidays,

early closing shops, and the like. But Saturday afternoon and Saturday night shopping go on, and are prolonged until midnight. Many shopmen do not go to bed until two o'clock on Sunday morning. And why? For whose benefit? For whose convenience? The answer which truth would make us, for the benefit and convenience of no one whatever. There is not the slightest advantage in it to the purchaser. To the storekeeper there is the disadvantage of a consumption of time, and of artificial light, and of strength, which is perfectly needless. There is not the slightest doubt of this. There is no gain in buying things at ten or eleven o'clock, which could just as readily have been purchased at five o'clock. And yet, if the shopkeeper be well examined, the strange discovery will be made that multitudes always drive off purchasing what they need until the latest possible hour. If a shop closes at seven o'clock, there will be comparatively little done until just before seven. Let it keep open an hour later, and the former purchasers will drive off shopping until nearly eight. Or, if again, the hour be prolonged until ten or eleven, it is found that although no more customers come in the aggregate, they delay their shopping to the latest possible time.

Now it is evident that hearty Christians have in these facts power for good in their hands if only they will use it. Let every one who reads this determine to adopt the following regulation and to ask every friend he possesses to do the same. Whenever he live, whatever his calling, and whether Churchman or Nonconformist, *could he find that he would lead the Christian amongst Christians?* Let every one do this: Let him make it a rule that he will complete all marketing and buying on Saturdays by five o'clock, if possible. And this is easily possible with most people. Where this is impracticable, let it be done by six o'clock. If absolutely impossible to accomplish it by six o'clock, let it become a fixed, rigid, religiously-kept rule, to do no sort of purchasing for self or by deputy after seven o'clock on Saturday evenings. This regulation ought to be kept by all ranks and orders of men, and if every Christian who came for the Lord's day *ambled to his cart about five* will only determine heartily to carry out this one suggestion, it will work marvels.

And how great and blessed would be the result! Thousands would soon be enabled to be in Sunday in the way in which Christians love to begin it, early, and not by a ten o'clock breakfast. Storekeepers would soon close early when they found buyers came early; and this would secure a proper Lord's Day or Christian day of rest, as well for the body as the soul, which clearly Sunday is intended to be. God's day would cease in a great degree to be abused as it now is, for they who cannot begin the day well are not likely to conclude as they ought. The solemn, earnest, affectionate appeal is therefore hereby made to all Christians, that they will henceforth determine to make purchases, and to cause parcels and goods to be sent to their homes, on Saturdays, *never* later than seven o'clock, and earlier if possible. Let them do this in love to thousands for whom Jesus died.

FORTY DAYS.

You have perhaps noticed that the Christmas decorations in church are left up till the second day in February, when we commemorate the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. This is a very old custom. But have you ever noticed the number of days, during which the Christmas Festival is thus in some measure prolonged? It is just forty. Forty days from the Nativity, when Christ was made Man in the substance of our flesh, to the day on which He was presented in the Temple "in the substance of our flesh," as the Collect says. Then very shortly afterwards follow the Forty Days of Lent, and then from Easter Day to Ascension Day comes a third period of Forty Days, which ended Christ's life on earth. In the first Forty we rejoice for God's blessed gift to us of a Saviour; in the second we mourn for His sufferings and death, and for our sins which caused them; in the third we give thanks for the great glory of His Resurrection and Ascension. And thus the Church preserves the proportion of faith, giving us an equal time to ponder over each of these great mysteries, the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection; an equal time to learn the deep truths which are taught by the Life manifest in the flesh, the Suffering Life and Death, and the Risen Life of the Son of God.

Love endureth all things. Sacrifices of ease, of time, of feeling, and of property, must all be endured, for it is impossible to exercise Christian charity without making these. He that would do good to others, without practising self-denial, does but dream. If we would promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures, it must be by parting with something or other that is dear to us.

THE JUDGMENT BOOK.

"AND the books were opened... and the dead were judged out of the things that were written in the books." "The words that I speak," said Jesus, "they shall judge him at that day." The Bible, then, the dear neglected Bible, that lies unopened in so many homes, is God's judgment book, and we need not wait till the last great day to know assuredly where we shall stand.

The criminal who appears before the bar condemned is not awaiting trial; that is past, and has resulted in proving him guilty. He now tremblingly hears his sentence. In God's sight that is the unbeliever's place even now. The words of Jesus come to us too plainly to be misunderstood. "He that believeth not is condemned already," not because he is a sinner, for Jesus has put away sin. "He has own self bare our sins," that we might live, but condemned because "he hath not believed." "He hath made him a liar because he hath not believed the record that God gave concerning his Son."

The trial, the probation is past, and the decision given. "Guilty," "all guilty," "before God." Who can reverse the wisdom of Infallible Love? A pardon offered, null and void; a pardon neglected, scorned, rejected; what will there be to plead?

THE BREAD OF LIFE.

The greatest Feast in the year is Easter Day. And so it has the longest time of preparation.

The day before Easter is Easter Even. But Good Friday is the great Fast which makes us see the importance of the Easter Festival. "It is Christ that died, you rather, that is risen again." And the week which commences on Palm Sunday is called the "Holy Week," or the "Great Week," special services for each day tell of the great day that begins the following week.

Besides, there are forty days in Lent. Not counting the Sundays, we find that six times six days make thirty-six; so there are six weeks in Lent, six Sundays in Lent. Four days more are needed to make up the forty days; we count back, and find that the "First Day of Lent" is Wednesday, or as we call it, Ash Wednesday.

But, before Ash Wednesday are other notes of preparation. Quinquagesima, Sexagesima, and Septuagesima mean that the days so called are, in round numbers, about fifty, sixty, and seventy days before Easter. So those seventy days like the threescore years and ten of our life, prepare for and look forward to the new life and the glory of the Resurrection.

It is easy to explain the reason of these calculations, and why we find them in the Book of Common Prayer. There are two "breaks" in the course of the Christian year. One of them is at the beginning of Advent, and the other at the beginning of Septuagesima. Advent Sunday is always the Sunday nearest St. Andrew's Day, the 30th of November, whether that Sunday be before or after St. Andrew's Day. Advent Sunday being fixed, the season of Trinity ceases when it comes; and the year goes on, one season following another till Septuagesima.

But next we have to settle how many Sundays there are to be in Epiphany. This we learn from first finding Easter Day. Having fixed that day, we count back in the way we have just done, and soon see where Epiphany ends, and where Septuagesima begins. Then all goes on in order till the end of the Trinity season is marked by the Sunday nearest St. Andrew's Day, which is the first Sunday in Advent.

I need not tell you more about this. And I can only allude to the old disputes in the Church as to the right time of observing Easter. That there were such disputes is a sign of the importance of the Feast, and of the care with which it was kept in ancient days.

It is better for us to see how all such thoughts affect ourselves. There is no doubt that what the whole Church does is meant to teach all the members of the Church something of their duty. And, if so, you can see at once the great duty of getting ready for Easter and for Easter duties in good time. More than this, you cannot help seeing the usefulness of looking far ahead, and eagerly expecting Easter as those who wait for the morning. Yes, the Easter morn is your object of desire; your Easter Communion early in the morning should be seen "afar off".

I say nothing to you about the preparation needful. You have learned something of it. Or, if you have not, you should lose no time in learning what is the wise and safe way of preparation in your case. I spend no time in telling you what to do. I only say to you in the Lord's words to Judas, "What thou doest, do quickly." Evil deeds are done fast, and you have done them in the past, perhaps, without hesitation, not being outrun in your way to death by those whose feet run to evil. *Now run that ye may obtain* refreshment; that God may give you the Bread of Life, which will give you strength; and that the miracle of the loaves and the wine may cause you to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.