

LENT.

The earliest name by which this season was known is that of the "Quadragesimal Fast," but whether the Latin name points to a period of forty *hours* or forty *days* has been the subject of much conjecture. A second name is that of the "Ante Paschal Fast," because from the most primitive times it has been the practice of the Church to fast before Easter, the Paschal Feast. The meaning of the familiar name of "Lent," by which we know the season cannot with certainty be decided, but is generally thought to be derived from the old English word "Leneten" or spring, referring to the time of year in which the Season occurs. So it seems that the name Quadragesima refers to the *length*—40; Ante Paschal to its *position*; and Lent to the time of year in which it occurs.

Irenæus, born A. D. 130, writing to Victor, Pope of Rome, speaking of the Fast before Easter, says, "Some think they should fast one day, others two, yet others more; some measure their day as consisting of forty hours of the day and night. And this variety in its observance has not originated in our time, but long before, in that of our ancestors." In this we see the early origin of a Lenten Fast, since Irenæus had sat at the feet of Polycarp and the latter we know (from a letter

written by Irenæus) often repeated how "he had intercourse with S. John and with the others who had seen the Lord." The Ante Paschal Fast was thus an established custom at least in the beginning of the second century and perhaps earlier, in the latter days of S. John the Divine.

The historian Socrates says: "One may observe how the ante paschal fast is differently observed by men of different churches. The Romans fast three weeks before Easter, the Sabbath and Lord's Day excepted; the Syrians and all Greece and the Alexandrians fast six weeks, and call it the Quadragesimal Fast; others commence their fast seven weeks before Easter, only fasting however fifteen days by intervals; but they also call this the Quadragesimal Fast."

Origen, born A. D. 185, also speaks of a fast of forty days before Easter.

Forty days is a period that frequently occurs in the Bible as a time of fasting and prayer. Thus Moses and Elijah fasted forty days; this was the number of years in which the Children of Israel did penance in the wilderness; and forty days were allowed the Ninevites in which to show their repentance; but more especially, this was the number of days our Lord fasted in the wilderness before His temptation.

Possibly, the original intention of the fast was to commemorate the forty hours of gloom