

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR MARCH.

MARCH 3rd—Quinquagesima. (Notice of Ash Wednesday).

" 6th—ASH-WEDNESDAY; Pr. Pss. M. 6, 32, 38, Communion Service. Evening, Pss. 102, 130, 138.

" 10th—1st Sunday in Lent. (Notice of Ember Days).

" 13th }
" 15th } EMBER DAYS.
" 16th }

" 17th—2nd Sunday in Lent.

" 24th—3rd Sunday in Lent. (Notice of Annunciation.

" 25th—Annunciation of Virgin Mary.

L E N T.

RIGHT REV. W. WALSAM HOW, D.D., LORD
BISHOP OF WAKEFIELD.

Forty days of penitence! Forty days of fasting! It seems to many unreal, unnatural, impossible. It may be unnatural to those who know nothing of the great change. The "natural man" is not very likely to understand or relish what is meant for the subduing of a corrupt nature. It may be impossible for the self-indulgent man. He who has long formed and carefully perfected the habit of giving way to his own wishes and desires at all times, will not find it easy to begin at once to subdue self and refuse indulgences to those wishes and desires. But anyhow it not to be unreal. Of all things, let us beware of unreality in our religion. Whatever we do or attempt, let it be real, and honest, and true. Better a very little and that real, than a great deal and that unreal. It is much more the fashion that it was to observe Lent as a season for more Church Services and less visiting and amusements. So far well. If we go to church to confess our sins and to pray, and give up parties that we may deny ourselves something in order to give more time and thought to God, it is good. But do let it all be real and true; no mere sham outward observance, which never reaches the inner man.

Now, I am sure a great many people honestly wish to do what is right, and to use such a

season as Lent for their soul's profit. And there are plenty who could tell them how blessed and helpful its observance has really been to themselves. So let us take counsel together about this matter, and see if we can find some practical thoughts which may help us.

1. The first thing we need, before we can begin to make a right use of Lent, is a sense of the sinfulness of sin. To gain or to deepen this, let Ash-Wednesday, the first day of Lent, be made a day of earnest, self-examination and fervent prayer. Then resolve that the thought of your sinfulness shall be a daily and abiding thought during this season. Let David's words, "My sin is ever before me," be your motto. Now we want to be *real*. So we must not exaggerate nor attempt what is beyond our power. It would be unreal to talk of weeping tears of sorrow for sin, or of smiting the breast with all the self-condemnation of the Publican in the parable, day by day. But it would not be unreal to talk of making the remembrance of our sin a special morning and evening thought, and to resolve to deepen our sense of sin by special self-examination and confession, let us say on each Friday, all through Lent. Suppose we begin by taking the seven Penitential Psalms, and resolved to say one of these each morning when we say our morning prayer. Then suppose we choose for ourselves seven passages of Scripture bearing on sin, and seven penitential hymns, and use one of each of these every night. This would be something practical, and which every one could do. If we are able to attend at any special Lenten services in Church, this will help us. In such ways we can keep the remembrance of our sins before us, and learn how hateful to God sin is. You will observe that we have not left the Sundays out, although in reality they are no part of the Lenten fast, the forty days being all week days, and the Sundays being always festivals. But just as Lent is marked in our Sunday Services by the Collects and Scripture teachings, as well as by the hymns selected, and the subjects usually chosen for the sermons, so it is well not quite to forget the season in our private devotions on Sunday, but to blend the thought of our sin with the thankful commemoration of the resurrection of Him who on that day brought life and immortality to light.

2. And now a word or two about self-denial. There are many who cannot fast literally, or who in their poverty keep a perpetual fast. But all can deny themselves in some way; and special acts of self-denial at such a time as this are a great help both in learning to govern self, and also as a reminder of the meaning and teaching of the season. Could you give up any little indulgence and so save something to give to the poor? You must not forget that God Himself points out this way of fasting as the best (see Is. lviii : 6-7). Could you deny yourself some favourite amusement, and spend the time saved either in study of God's word, or in doing acts of kindness to others? Could you give a little longer time to prayer or devotional reading? If you can do any such little act of self-denial, do it very simply and quietly, without any display of self-importance. Offer it humbly to God as a little sacrifice willingly made to Him. He will accept and bless it for the sake of the one great sacrifice of Him who "pleased not Himself" but gave Himself for us, "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour."

BIBLE AND PRAYER-BOOK.

In spite of the scepticism which is so fashionable in these days, and perhaps partly in consequence of it, there is, happily, among our country folk, whether they are churchmen or not, a great reverence, on the whole, for the Bible. A Bible-class is often popular in rural parishes, where lectures on ecclesiastical sub-

jects, including even the Prayer-book, would not be attended; and there is probably no Article among the Thirty-nine which finds such ready acceptance among unsophisticated people whose attainments are summed up by "the three R's," as the Sixth.

This general reverence for Holy Scripture is a thing to be very thankful for, but it is hardly too much to say that it often degenerates into superstition. There are those who prate of 'the Bible and Bible only,' much as if they believed that the Authorized English Version had come straight from Heaven, like the Hebrew Decalogue, *before*, or at any rate at the very beginning of, the Christian Religion, and that every person was intended to find out the truths as well as the precepts of Christianity from it and from it only.

Now it is of the highest importance that such persons, or such of them as have ears to hear, and are really willing to learn and not be teachers only, should have it impressed upon them, kindly but earnestly, that they should derive much more benefit than they do from the study of the Bible, if they would read it by the light of the *Prayer-book*. The fact is that they are in the habit of putting the Scripture to a use for which they were never intended. Just as those persons are utterly baffled, who approach such accounts as the famous First Chapter of Genesis with a view to getting information on natural science, so do those well-meaning students fail, who think to form, each for himself, a system of theological dogmas, merely by searching within the four corners of the Bible. We had a conspicuous instance of this a few weeks ago, when, in our correspondence columns, a puzzle writer stated that he could not find infant baptism ordered in the Bible. There are several important things besides this, as other correspondents have pointed out, which a person would not discover from the Bible, merely by his own unassisted search. How, for instance, would he gather and rightly formulate, the great doctrine of the Trinity from the Bible only? To be sure, with the Authorized Version, he might go some way towards doing so by the help of 1 St. John, 5-7; but the whole of this verse, except the first seven words, is acknowledged to be interpolated, as well as the beginning of the following verse, so that this passage, as correctly given in the Revised Version here affords an instance of the Bible being illustrated by Church teaching; for the interpolated words are clearly from some ancient Church formula, and agree with the teaching of the *Quicumque vult*, which is found, not in the Bible, but in the *Prayer-book*.

The undoubted historical fact that The Church was in very active operation, and spreading into many lands, for some twenty long years before a single word of the New Testament was written, is a fact which is far too much lost sight of, and of which people should be reminded constantly, from the pulpit and elsewhere. For the corollaries which spring from this fact are of the utmost consequence, viz.: (1) That the doctrines of the Church are antecedent to the New Testament, and were originally taught, not from the Bible, but from the sacred deposit of the truth which was given to the Church, *once for all*, when it was founded or inaugurated, on the Day of Pentecost; and (2) that no Christian writings could have been accepted by the early Church as divinely inspired, which did not thoroughly harmonise with the doctrines which they the Church had already received.

Now, it is the *Prayer-book* which represents the teaching of the Primitive Church, and therefore the New Testament should be read in the light of the *Prayer-book*. This is in accordance with the ancient dogma, 'The Church teaches, Scripture confirms.' Just as we never begin to instruct young children from the Bible only, but generally from some simple form of catechism, thus really using the *Prayer-book*