

clusive in favor of the assertion, that fasting may be made conducive to the growth and strengthening of religion in the soul? The next point of enquiry may be, what do you mean by "fasting?" This is answered by the question of the Pharisees. They go to our Lord and ask, "Why do the Disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees, but thine eat and drink?" Is it not evident that they held that because our Lord's disciples "ate and drank" they did not fast? And it is equally evident that our Lord held the same view, when He reproved them not for a false charge, (He admitted that His disciples did not fast because the bridegroom was with them), but for making fasting the end, when it was only a help for attaining the end of better serving God. I answer that we mean by "fasting" not some fanciful spiritual exercise, but simply abstinence from food. And "to what extent?" one asks. I do not know that I can express myself better than by adopting the beautiful language of our Collect. We pray for "Grace to use such abstinence that the flesh being subdued to the spirit, we may ever obey the godly motions of God's Holy Spirit in righteousness and true holiness." You perceive there is no iron rule laid down, to be applied to all alike, to sick and well, to rich and poor, to weak and strong. If one says "you would make me injure my health, unfit my body for its temporal duties and render me morose and uncharitable in temper," I answer, "If it has that effect, you are making an entire mistake in your fasting." Another may say, "I give up my usual food and live well by the change; that is my fast." And I have no other remark for that than, "such a fast is an absurdity." This is the voice of Scripture, "Feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord."

Beware lest when thou hast eaten and art full, then thine heart be lifted up and thou forget the Lord thy God. "They were filled and their heart was exalted, therefore have they forgotten me saith the Lord."

The extent of our fasting, then, should be that moderation that will sustain nature and yet not pamper appetite; and that mortification of the pamper flesh that will so subdue it to the Spirit, that the naturally violent and impetuous propensities of the flesh may be more surely controlled and conquered.

But there is a solemn warning uttered by our Lord on this subject. "You are not to fast as the hypocrites." How then did they fast? Why, their object was to be seen and praised of men. They were seen bowing down the head as a bulrush, spreading sackcloth and ashes under them; they were seen making as much profession of seeking God daily, and of delighting to know His ways, as those who did righteousness and forsook not the ordinances of God. They would put to shame, by their zeal for forms, some who were not hypocrites, but there was so little of religion.