

much as the present generation may surpass, in spirituality of *appearance*, the generations which have more immediately preceded it, we strongly suspect if the heart were laid open there would be found less of that true but unostentatious piety—less of that firm principle, that solid scriptural faith—and less of that deep practical devotion, which so eminently characterized and supported the early Reformers and Martyrs, under the trials and persecutions of that eventful period.

In times of sorrow and affliction, *fasting* has been more or less practised in all ages, and by all nations, of the world. It is indeed, in some sort, the natural consequence of grief; and it serves to show, among other things, how intimate the connexion is between the mind and the body, and how powerfully they are affected by mutual sympathy. Thus circumstanced, the mind, absorbed in the one prevailing contemplation, turns an inattentive ear to the wants of the body, and even suspends for a time the usual cravings of hunger.

Anterior to the age of Moses, we find no mention made of *fasts*. It is highly probable, however, that *fasting* was practised by the Patriarchs; though from its reasonableness, or, it may be, from the very brief history we have of Patriarchal times, such circumstance has not been expressly noticed.—But since the time of Moses, *fasts* have been not only of frequent recurrence, but they have also, in some sense, and on some occasions, been enjoined by God himself. And so long as the Jewish Church existed, *fasting* formed a very prominent, and it may be, very valuable religious observance, by which the Jews were assisted in subjecting the body to the mind, and in preparing both for the better and more spiritual discharge of the offices of devotion.

From the Jews, it is highly probable that this practice was first introduced among the Gentile or Heathen nations. And here in the text we have proof how widely the practice had spread, and what firm footing it had obtained; since the king of Nineveh immediately orders recourse to be had to it, among other means, by which to strive to avert the impending judgments of Heaven.

Under the Gospel-dispensation no particular *fasts* are appointed by Divine authority. It does not appear that any such were instituted by Christ himself, nor yet by the Apostles at his command.* When, however, the Pharisees reproached Christ that his disciples did not fast so rigidly as their disciples did, his answer clearly implies that, though his disciples did not then fast, a time would arrive when they also should fast:

* In this instance, as well as in many others, our Saviour sanctioned the prevailing usage. His own instructions on this subject relate to the spirit in which the duty should be performed.

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