

FASTING AND SELF-DENIAL.

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

"Sanctify a Fast."—Joel ii. 15.

NEXT to Good Friday, Ash-Wednesday, or the First day of Lent, is the chief fast day of the year. From ancient times it has been kept by Christians as a solemn day of much penitence, and humiliation, and prayer, and fasting, and self-denial.

Now, what is the use of a fast day? And why should we have a season marked out by our Church as a fast, like the season of Lent? Surely that by denying and keeping under the body we may have the soul more fitted for penitence and prayer.

Let us think a little of this matter. Listen first to the words of our Lord Himself: "Whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Now, if words mean anything at all, these words mean that a true Christian must practice self-denial. They mean that, as Christ's life was a life of self-sacrifice and suffering, so, if a man would follow Christ, he must follow Him in this too, and curb and deny self, that he may be more like his heavenly Master.

But why is it, that in these days men are so impatient of Christ's yoke, that they refuse to accept these things? Why are the mortifying of the flesh, the keeping of the body under, fasting, and general self-denial—why are these things received so unwillingly?

Is it because they are not commanded in Holy Scripture? Nay,

St. Paul bids us mortify our members which are upon the earth, and sets us the example, for he says "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection;" and we know our Blessed Lord Himself repeatedly urged the duty upon His disciples, and declared that a high state of grace was only to be obtained by such a course of life. But is it not that we are not willing to make the required sacrifices? Is it not because we prefer to pamper the body and live a life of ease and self-indulgence, and that we have no desire to give up *all*, but only a little of the things which, as Christians, we are called upon to renounce?

Oh! that we were more willing to obey our Divine Master, to walk as He walked? Oh! that we loved more to obey and please Him, and so were willing and anxious to do all, to give up all for Christ's sake!

Oh! that we all longed to press more closely after the Master we profess to follow! Oh! that we all strove more honestly to plant our footsteps in the path He trod! We should not then shrink as we do from even the least acts of self-denial and self-discipline. What if we cut off from us some little indulgence or pleasure; what if we take upon us some little burden of toil; is it not richly repaid if it bring us even one step nearer to Christ?

I know there will be some always who will feel that such language as this may be very well for a clergyman to use, or at least may be the language which it is the custom to use, and which may be found in books, but it is not language which describes the real truth of things, or which finds an echo in the hearts