

such good things, how much better will the feast be which is prepared for us? Now, the idolatrous nations are compared to dogs, as it said in Isaiah (lvi. 11), "Yea, they are greedy dogs." They are in prosperity in this world: and will not Israel be much more in prosperity in the world to come? This is the meaning of the text, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart." One reflection will probably be suggested to the reader of the New Testament: that the parables of the "Midrash," of which that is a more than average specimen, are vastly inferior in dignity, in aptness, and in all the elements of literary merit, to the earlier parables with which our Lord has made us familiar.

From what has been said it will have been gathered that in this field of the older Hebrew literature, much ground has to be broken before anything of real value can be found. The explorer is indeed at times rewarded by the discovery of something which serves to illuminate some feature of the New Testament with not a little of the brilliancy which it naturally bore to the oriental eye of old time, but which it has almost lost to our changed perceptions and habits in the west. That perhaps, imparts to the literature of the "Midrash" a value which it will never lose; but, as students of Scripture, if we want a caution that we are not to be misled by its vagaries, its extravagances, its triviality, we have it in that Hebrew saying of these very Rabbies themselves—

הדרשה תדרוש אבל אין המקרא יוצא מדי פשוטו.

You may expound your "Midrash," almost as we should say, You may preach your sermon; but the Scripture does not leave its simple and literal sense.

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ART. III.—FASTING.

FASTING was an institution of the Old Covenant, as it is of the New. Our Lord scarcely alludes to it: as St. Chrysostom hath it, His direct command is rather "eat" than "fast": His apparent recommendation of it as a source of spiritual strength is, like St. Paul's in 1 Cor. vii. 5, of dubious textual authority: yet His non-ascetic ministry was preceded by the great fast of forty days. It is an observance ordered in our English Church.

What is fasting? What is the final cause of fasting? Familiar as is the well-known word, it may be that since both

our teaching and our practice in this matter show differences and divergences indicative of confusion of thought, some endeavour to answer these inquiries may not only give an opportunity for that discussion, that "shaking about," or worrying of a topic (though *discutio* in this sense is hardly classical), which brings us together here,¹ but also throw some light on a question where light seems to be needed.

But what is fasting?

The former of our homilies on fasting, which we all believe contains doctrine profitable for the year 1571, argues that, because our Saviour agreed that His disciples, inasmuch as they ate and drank, fasted not, fasting is a "withholding of meat, drink, and all natural food from the body for the determined time of fasting." The same homily quotes a canon of Chalcedon to the same effect.

But less simple authorities distinguish (*e.g.* Bellarmine) *jejunium spirituale, i.e.*, fasting from *vice*; *morale*, which equals temperance; *naturale*, unqualified abstinence; and *ecclesiasticum*, which we see may allow vice, and is neither starvation nor temperance. Erasmus ("Pietas Puerilis") distinguishes *naturale* "ad tuendam valetudinem," and *civile ad obeunda promptius negotia*, from *religiosum*, of which more hereafter. In attempting a definition we shall be helped, as we are always helped, by the history of the words which we use; for how would both the sweetness and light of conversation and controversy be increased if no bit of their currency were ever issued or passed without knowledge of their image, superscription and value?

In the Old Law the meaning of the technical term for fasting is *afflicting the soul*. Whether the Aramaic word used by our Lord was the equivalent of this affliction of the soul or of the more vernacular word *tsom*, used by prophets and the psalmist, must be, more or less, matter of conjecture. The evangelist's word *νηστεία* and its correlatives is, of course, formed from the privative *νή* and *ἐσθίω*, and means not eating.

The Latin words *jejunus* and *jejunium*, which have been so widely circulated in the Church, and appear in the modern *déjeuner*, are traced to a root, which has much the same connotation as the almost synonymous *abstinentia*, and express the idea of self-restraint and holding aloof. The same force is latent in our English "fast," which is an early offshoot of the Teutonic "fast" in the sense of firm, strong, strict; fast, equalling firm, being kindred with *ποῦς*—*pes*, foot. To fast, therefore, is to exercise a strong moral restraint, like that of a man who makes a firm stand, puts his foot down, and says "no" when

¹ This paper was written to open a discussion at a Clerical Society.

needed. Our vocabulary leads us to define fasting as affliction of the soul, coupled with marked moral and physical self-restraint. It reminds us further, through its Greek words, that this self-restraint has very commonly expressed itself in curtailment or temporary refusal of the commonest of animal pleasures—the satisfaction of hunger. I say “curtailment” because, just as the Greeks said *γυμνός* of a man in only his under-garment; just as St. Paul’s storm-tossed shipmates were *ἄστροι* for fourteen days, not in the sense of taking no food, but of taking no regular meals, and barely keeping body and soul together in the face of their apparently imminent disjunction; so *νηστεία* is said of eating very little, or of not eating and drinking certain viands and beverages, as meat and wine. I therefore define fasting, viewed as a Christian custom, to be *sorrowful self-restraint, most frequently shown in eating and drinking.*

We ask next, What is the final cause of fasting? This I apprehend to be twofold, regarding both the past and the future, or, rather, a future so immediate that in most analogous cases it is better to regard it as the present. In answer, then, to the question, “Why fast?” we may say partly for the past, partly for the present. Why for the past? Because there is so much in our past as a race, as a people, as families, as individuals, of sorrow, that, assuming the propriety of marking anniversaries at all, we may well mark sorrowful anniversaries by sorrowful curtailment of pleasure. For all “the souls” that “were perfect once” it seems well to exercise sorrowful self-restraint on the day kept in memory of the supreme agony of Him who “found out the remedy.” Again, our land has not recently seen many shameful or crushing disasters; but, had our Miletus been taken, we should probably not care to see any play at all as the year brought round the day. Again, a David would hardly feast his chief estates on the anniversary of his Absalom’s death. A thoughtful and penitent soul will instinctively turn away from many pleasures, quite lawful in themselves, when the date on the calendar summons black memories from the past, and will feel “to-day these things are not only not expedient for me, they are not possible.”

But the Church is the happy hill-country where the climbing Christian may forget the mud and mist which lie behind, and reach forward to the white slopes of high enterprise which rise before. Wholesome fasting has less to do with the past than with the immediate present. What is the good of fasting? We perhaps cannot get a better reply than by referring to the two collects which we use on the first and second Sundays of the penitential season of Lent, and which are at least as old as the Sacramentary of Gregory. In the

first we pray to the great Fester of the Wilderness of Paradise regained to "give us grace to use such abstinence that, our flesh being subdued to the spirit, we may obey His godly motions in righteousness and true holiness." In the second we are opportunely reminded that the most pious and healthy abstinence can have no power of itself to help us, and further that the Divine defence is desirable not only against "adversities which may happen to the body," but also against "all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul." In short, we ask for such abstinence as may from time to time conduce to the preservation of the Christian *Mens Sana* in the Christian *Corpus Sanum*, and make us at once more vigilant and more vigorous, manfully fighting our ceaseless fight against sin, the world and the devil. If the true end of sorrowful self-restraint is, for the past, such godly sorrow as works repentance, it is for the present the readiness of the happy warrior to do his duty in the battle of life.

Having thus cleared the ground by defining fasting and its objects, we may do well to note some of the misconceptions and exaggerations which stand in the way of obedience to a discipline recommended on high authority. On the whole, there is perhaps less need now and in England to insist on the narrower fasting of *νηστεία*—mere abstention from food—than there was in the grosser times of imperial banquets. We look from a distance at the Roman vulgarity of costly piles of fantastic meats, and the filthinesses (which it were a slur on God's beasts to call beastly) of the vomitoria and the *secunda jamae*. We see afar off stout Scandinavian princes qualifying for heaven by gorging themselves to stupor on earth. And, of course, all questions of diet are largely questions of race and climate. The kind and amount of food conducive to a beatific spirit and bodily and mental activity in an oriental Euphrates valley may mean peevish incapacity in the valley of the Thames. Still, the Protestant Reformation has something to answer for in its discountenance of a diminished diet, and its association of high principles of politics and Catholicity with butcher's meat. I am not at all sure that Archbishop Cranmer was really advancing the best interests of this realm when in March, 1547, he did what Mr. Froude tells us was "to fourths of the English world as agitating as if among ourselves the opera house was to be opened on a Sunday, and the Bishop of London to appear in a private box," *i.e.*, "did eat meat openly in Lent, in the Hall of Lambeth, the like of which was never seen since England was a Christian country." All well-to-do people, as a rule, eat too much. Everybody who can get it—barring a handful of modern Priscillianists—eats too much

meat. Fish on Wednesday and Friday, or Tuesday and Thursday if you will, might possibly conduce to wider obedience to Christ's godly motions. And, if our gluttons and gourmets are less fit than Vitellius, or Ciotto the Florentine, for the mire of that special circle of Dante's Hall, where Cerberus, prolonging for ever the pangs of indigestion, "tears the spirits, flays them, and their limbs piecemeal disparts," what shall we say of intemperance in intoxicating drinks? We want fasting here. We shall probably be agreed that the best hope of the growing temperance of England lies in the extent to which all of every rank and age can be brought to recognise that the worst damnation incurred by either fury or coma of drunkenness is the unfitting of soul and body to obey a loving Master's godly motions.

Failure to fast, as exemplified in a general lust for amusement, is another prevalent evil of our age. "Whatever you do, amuse yourself," is a *vox populi*, and would be recognised as a *vox Dei* if only those who say so loudest recognised a *Deus* to have a *vox*. Amusement is the work of the idle, and some of the best of them originate societies for providing amusement for the unamused. Here there seems ample room for recommending a sorrowful self-restraint, with a view to obeying holy influences. On the whole, we should be a merrier England, in the best sense, if we had more godly fasting.

Yet no pendulum swing starts from the perpendicular. That the Protestant Reformation should have gone to a needless extreme of depreciation, if not of condemnation, of fasting, is hardly to be wondered at when we recall the opposite extreme of mediæval superstition. No doubt our judicious Anglican is right in regretting the hurt "grown to the Church of God, through a false imagination that fasting standeth men in no stead for any spiritual respect, but only to take down the frankness of nature, and to tame the wildness of flesh."¹ "The world" in Hooker's day, he goes on, "being bold to surfeit, doth now blush to fast, supposing that men when they fast do rather bewray a disease than exercise a virtue." But how could the society that laughed under the lightning satire playing from those thin lips of Erasmus, or heard the thunder peal from Luther's thick ones, discern virtue or manliness in what the Church had come to teach about fasting? It was a patent folly; a great gastronomic farce. Sorrow and humiliation were lost in a frivolous etiquette, and self-restraint in the indulgence of the sillier and blinder self. Mere reference to these absurdities seems unseemly in the discussion of what concerns the faith of the saints; but we cannot measure the

¹ Hooker, v. 72.

healthy mean without taking into our reckoning both kinds of extravagance. Not only was the fasting of the mediævalist an unspiritual form, but it was fatally confused with weightier matters of the law of love. Take, for instance, the story which Jeremy Taylor quotes from Poggio, of the Neapolitan peasant who came in distress to own to his priest that he had eaten animal food in Lent. He was making a cheese, he said, and some of the whey accidentally spurted into his mouth. How purge this heinous sin? "Is that all you can charge your conscience with?" said the priest. "I know that men of your class sometimes waylay, rob, and kill stray travellers: are you guilty of such deeds?" "Rob and kill a traveller!" rejoins the peasant. "I hope you do not call that a deadly sin? We all do it; almost every week. But I never touched animal food in Lent before." Well, it may be said this was the crass stupidity of a hind; his priest would show him better. But what of the clergy? Poggio's facetiæ were published in 1538. The ecclesiastical world had been interested for centuries in nice questions as to what was or was not fasting. Up to the fourth century notions and practices were loose. Rigour began with Leo the Great (A.D. 460) in the fifth century. The eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries seem to have been the period when extremists commanded most obedience. And in the eleventh, according to Baronius, meat-eaters in Lent were liable to forcible extraction of the teeth. Up to the period of the Reformation, as, after, the Church was sorely exercised about fasting, quite apart from the question of the sorrow or the moral restraint of the faster. "It is instructive," says Bishop Kingdon, "to watch the gradual advance in the meaning of the word 'fasting,' as applied to those about to communicate. For a long time it was only applied to one kind of fast, which would now be called an ecclesiastical fast. But when reverence and devotion brought in the idea that it was congruous to the dignity of the Sacrament that it should be the first food taken in the day, it was 'probably to be the first food taken after the night's sleep.' But as some persons did not sleep, it was laid down that a man was fasting ready for Communion when digestion was complete." St. Thomas Aquinas was satisfied if a man took no food after the commencement of the day, as the Roman Church computed the day—"a convenient definition," sweeping away "all difficulties about digestion and sleep, and all other such questions." "But"—hitherto I have somewhat abridged, here I quote Bishop Kingdon at length—"there were other doctors in the thirteenth century who still clung to the notion of the ecclesiastical (as distinguished from the so-called natural) fast; and these said that a man might take electuaries, or ginger, or

such like, by way of stay stomach without impediment to reverent Communion." At the period of the Reformation we find Protestants protesting, on the one hand, against the fast that was so easy as to be a feast under another name; on the other, against a vain asceticism. But triflers trifled on. "Sala,¹ in his notes upon Bona,² says that any opinion favouring mitigation of the Fast ought to be held an error in faith. 'This is nearly approaching to a heresy, and therefore it is almost as bad as giving the cup to the laity.' Further refinements were soon introduced. The popular Summist, Sylvester of Priesio, says that a man may clean his teeth with salt and vinegar so long as he does not swallow any. Later ritualists forbid this luxury. The question was raised as to whether a man was properly fasting if he said his matins the afternoon before, and took any food afterwards; or whether he had to say matins again the next morning of necessity before communicating. Then came the question of a man going to sleep with a lozenge or sugar-candy in his mouth to prevent coughing in the night: how can he be assured that he had not swallowed some after midnight? Here was a nice question for the casuists, and there are two opinions on the subject: the weight of authority inclines to the determination that such a thing impedes Communion. Then comes the question of tobacco. Here was something that would comfort and prevent wretchedness of hunger without breaking *the fast of nature*. A man, then, may smoke, chew tobacco, or take snuff, though he swallow either smoke, or juice, or snuff, unless he does it *per industriam* of set purpose to eat, or to take it as food. This decision must have been arrived at by devotees to this narcotic leaf; others would perhaps think such a determination the reverse of reverent. Though this, therefore, is the rule of Roman and Continental casuistry, there are canons passed in Mexico which make it a matter of eternal condemnation to take snuff before Mass. What, therefore, is allowed in Italy is mortal sin in America. Then, again, we read that water *attracta per nares*, drawn up through the nostrils, does not break the fast so as to hinder Communion. And so on through many curious scruples (such, again, as swallowing paper or parchment), which seem perhaps to an English mind to show that the chief end in view is not reverence to the Sacrament, but the keeping the rule in the rubric.

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"But in England the domestic canons on this head never

¹ Robert Sala of Turin, 1749.

² Cardinal; Res Liturgicæ, 1671.

found their way into the rubrics of the Sarum Missal, hence we find no discussions in Lyndwood as to whether sucking a piece of ivory or bone breaks the fast. It may be that this is owing to what Dr. Newman calls our 'national good sense.'"¹

These examples of the carnal and unspiritual degradation of a possible aid to good living are cited by Bishop Kingdon with reference to fasting as necessary to due partaking of the holy mysteries of the Eucharist. I have purposely so narrowed the question here from the general to the particular, because what is called "Fasting Communion" affords an instructive illustration of how a practice, in itself innocent, or even, when the circumstances of men and manners are taken into account, desirable, may become, when frozen into a rigid law, recommended and enforced by unintelligent formalists, at once ridiculous and pernicious. And, it may be feared, to judge from some recent utterances, that it has for us a more than antiquarian interest, and is in some quarters so treated as to imperil the high character which the venerable Cardinal is pleased to give to English Catholics for national good sense.

There is no injunction, Divine or apostolic, imposing the duty of Fasting Communion. No law binding in our Church enforces any such observance. We may naturally infer that it was a custom of the first century to celebrate the Eucharist before the first meal of the day, from the fact that the first Christians assembled to worship early in the morning. For their thus assembling early in the morning there may have been many reasons—reasons alike of expediency and reverence will readily suggest themselves; but it is nowhere even hinted that they assembled early that they might assemble fasting. And as the early Church knew no such law, so neither does our own Church so order. We are, therefore, free to consider the question from the point of view of general edification, and may well wish to consider it without detriment to our character for common-sense. We shall all be agreed that it is desirable for the rite of the Holy Communion so to be rendered in all matters of secondary importance as to draw to the sacred board the largest possible number of devout recipients of the mysteries; for them to be in such a condition of mind and body as shall best enable them—with souls strengthened and refreshed by the body and blood of Christ, He. in them, and they in Him—to join with angels and archangels in lauding and magnifying His Name, and so to go forth, whether to the business of our common life or through the grave and gate of death, as to carry with them the abiding presence of the Eternal.

¹ Bp. Kingdon, "Fasting Communion."

We might ask whether these ends are consistent with anything like sorrowful self-restraint—whether there is not an incongruity approaching to wickedness in the very idea of fasting on the feast, and whether those old worthies were not right who, like St. Epiphanius, taught that it was wrong to fast on the Lord's Day? Of course, the sacred commemoration of the Passion must be safeguarded from any unseemly association with the merriment or the thoughtlessness of a common meal; the proximity of even the Agapæ was dangerous to the infant Church of Corinth, and the awful Presence was not distinguished amid the unsanctified eating and drinking. But the very same peril is risked by long separation from, as from close nearness to, the satisfaction of ordinary hunger. There is an obvious danger lest the thoughts of the hungry communicant should be diverted from the extraordinary to the ordinary bread.

Think of what is wanted in the good communicant—profound reverence; abstraction from distracting thoughts; soul ready to be joined in indescribable communion with the Unseen; body ready to act under the authority of spirit itself; conscience under the authority of the Divine; the happy gratitude of a welcome guest; the genial cheerfulness of a sharer of the best; the sober enthusiasm of a reasonable worshipper. Are these conditions likely to be produced by physically irritating alterations in the ordinary habits of decent simple life? By calculations as to how long since supper, or how long before breakfast? There are many obvious and excellent reasons why early Communion should be held, and why many devout worshippers should prefer them. But I cannot see that the fact of their being in most cases fasting Communion tells necessarily in their favour. There are assuredly not a few obvious and excellent arguments to be adduced in favour of Communion celebrated after morning prayer, and I am equally unable to see why any noon-communicant should be ordered to go without his breakfast, or be unto us as worse than a heathen and a publican if he has breakfasted. Even in the old English breakfast-of-beef-and-beer days, should we be justified in despising the mid-day sacrament? Even if beef and beer might seem an inappropriate preface to an awful service, against the changed conditions of our dietary no such obligation can lie; and as a general rule it would seem that a pious communicant, even early in the morning, might benefit none the less—perhaps the more—from the holiest mysteries of our faith, after modest sustenance from the gentle beverages and viands of our tables. It is a matter to be left to be guided as various needs and circumstances may require. There is that communicateth fasting to the Lord, as there is that

communicateth fasting not to the Lord, and it would be as cruel and stupid to say in all cases you shall not communicate fasting, as to say in all cases you shall not communicate except fasting. The great objects to be sought is that no one at God's table should be thinking of his meaner self and his lower wants at all. His mind should be free, and the more he can forget his body the better. Not a few fasting communicants must be in danger of coming to the Divine entertainment as some folks come to a human entertainment—fidgety about their appetites, or their clothes, or some form of the infinitely little.

So far I have considered this aspect of fasting Communion only in relation to the subject. It is impossible quite to pass over—though I would fain quite pass over, for I hardly know how to find words not indecent and irreverent wherein to touch on—reasons which have been, and, I believe, are, given for fasting Communion, in connection with the state of the consecrated Bread and Wine after their reception and manducation by the communicant. It is only right to note, and I note with thankfulness, that leaflets and manuals which I have seen issued with the cachet of our more materialistic brethren are for the most part free from this curious superstition, but it appears that 11,000 copies of a small tract, edited by a committee of clergy, teach its readers that "When about to celebrate the Divine Mysteries, we do not allow upon the altar anything which has not an immediate connection with the ministration of our Lord's Body and Blood, so when we are about to receive that Body and Blood into our bodies, we should take care that the resting-place of the Sacraments be not preoccupied."

Reverence is so good and so rare a thing that even misdirected reverence seems to claim the kindest consideration. Yet the ugly results of a misapprehension of the true nature and object of sober and righteous Christian fasting are certainly seen in most distressing forms in the case of fasting before celebration of the Holy Eucharist. I will give three illustrations of what I mean: (i.) The first shows how hardly the rigorists' precept of Fasting Communion may tell against the devout sick. I quote it from Bishop Kingdon. We must remember that the mediæval rule only allows Communion without fasting in *articulo mortis*. A rigorist priest refused to communicate an invalid because the medical man had directed food to be taken every two hours. The invalid, "after refraining from Communion for some time, becoming greatly distressed, persuaded a priest to celebrate at a quarter before one in the morning. Thus the natural fast was observed, though food had been taken within an hour of

the act of Communion. Surely this," adds the Bishop, "could not have been a reasonable service." Reasonable service!

My second illustration I give on the authority of a London clergyman of wide information as to the manners and customs of his brethren: he tells me that among the "advanced" clergy—pardon my condoning popular misuse of a term which properly, of course, connotes rather progress than extravagance—it is not unusual for the priest who is to celebrate at noon to remain away from earlier services, and stave off hunger by smoking, unaware, perhaps, that by several Mexican Councils of equivalent authority to those of which much is made by his authorities, "prohibetur sub reatu pœnæ æternæ damnationis presbyteris celebraturis ne tabaci pulverem naribus etiam prætextu medicinæ ante sacrificium sumant." If there were no *via media* between a priest's coming to officiate at the Eucharist literally without having tasted food, and, as the Second Council of Macon (585) phrases it, "crepulus vino," the former alternative were preferable. Canon Liddon (on Evening Communion) "is disposed to think that the English habit of lying in bed on Sunday morning is an evil with which the clergy ought to wage unceasing war." What of a clerical habit of lying in bed in order the more easily to celebrate fasting?

The third instance is that of the little daughter of an acquaintance of my own. She was of weak health, and her parents wished her to take some slight nourishment before going out in the morning to Church. A young curate heard of this, and was much shocked at the violation of the Church's rule. His advice to the damsel—that word will hint a contrast which is not un instructive—his advice to the damsel was, "if you say you are not able to come out to Early Communion fasting, eat a heavy supper as near midnight as you can the night before."

Surely it is not too much to say of the unworthy [*ἀνάξιον*] feeling and teaching thus exhibited, that they spring from a failure *διακρίνειν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου* (1 Cor. xi. 29). Yet it is inevitable that injudicious enthusiasm, unaware of the purest Catholic doctrine on the subject, should run into extremes, when we find leaflets issued such as the one which I mention, published with the brand on it of an honoured name. It is edited by the Rev. A. H. Mackonochie.

It states that "the Practice of the Church from early days has been to lay down as a general rule for her children that they should go fasting to receive the Holy Communion." What "early days"? Where is this "Rule"?

"By fasting," he says, "is meant going absolutely without food of any kind, either solid or liquid, from the previous mid-

night. Some people, through ignorance or self-indulgence, take the matter into their own hands."

The Church. *What Church? when? where?* The Church Catholic, *never*; the pure and Apostolic branch of it established in these realms, *never*. The most that can be truly said by advocates of Fasting Communion is that it was in some places a recognised necessity in the fourth century.

To argue that this was one of the rest of the points which St. Paul set in order when he came to Corinth, is an instance of arguments from wishes to facts. Canon Bright cannot controvert the position that "There is no law or canon binding in England now so as to make those that are unable to follow this custom liable to a charge of mortal sin, as having broken a positive precept." It may be a pious custom, recommended to the consciences and hearts of many, into which God forbid that I or anyone should pry, least of all with cold and unkind criticism. But this is a very different thing from a law of Divine or even of high ecclesiastical authority, to be imposed on all.

Fasting Communion, viewed as a matter of moral and spiritual taste, happily illustrates that view of fasting generally which it is the purpose of this short paper to promote. Such affliction of the soul, coupled with marked moral and physical restraint as may help a worthy Communicant to due self-examination, and stimulate to lively faith, thankful remembrance, and universal charity, by all means let him exercise. But as to the details of amount and kind of this abstinence, our Church, while wisely naming appropriate times and seasons, declines to make rules fussy, foolish and irritating, and, like the sensible mother of a household, ready, if need arise, to regulate every jot and tittle of life by the application of sound principles, refuses to make the Divine Letter illegible by magnifying tittles and jots, and bases her parental despotism on broad grounds of reverence and love.

In answer, then, to any inquiry as to what kinds of sorrowful restraint in eating and drinking, or in anything else, best helps us to maintain in soul and body the mastery of the Spirit, we should say that this is best left very much to the consciences of individuals, and must largely vary with the varying needs of the Church. "Every man," as Dr. Johnson says, "is to judge for himself, according to the effects which he experiences. One of the Fathers," he adds—I have not verified the reference—"tells us he found fasting made him so peevish that he did not practise it." No better illustration can be furnished of this wholesome liberty and variety than the want of uniformity about the present penitential season of Lent. The Apostles appointed no days, because, as says John Cassian,

the friend and pupil of Chrysostom, "as long as the perfection of the primitive Church did remain, there was no observation of a Lent Fast." Lent came in with laxity of discipline. The Lent of Irenæus was one of one or two days or more; at Byzantium it has been a week of weeks. So late as the fifth century at Rome it lasted three weeks. Jerome represented Lent as intended for "imperfect and secular persons," who were in an unfit state to make a good Easter Communion. Charlemagne would punish wanton disregard of Lent with death; but as to the length or manner of his godly discipline, the Catholic Church has never pronounced.

But however various the quality and quantity of sorrowful self-restraint which it may be well from time to time to prescribe and to practise, there are certain notes of guidance on the agenda (and negligenda) paper of life's action, which we may safely mark and obey.

There is no good in fasting for the sake of fasting; still less is there any good in fasting, as the prophet says, "for strife and debate." Rather, in these days it might be well for penitential seasons to be appointed and enforced, when, in sorrowful self-restraint, men should be compelled to fast from strife and debate; and in an age that suffers more from surfeits of talk than from surfeits of meat, keep sometimes a Lenten silence even from good words. Such silence might be even more patriotic than the fish diet, which the homily on fasting loyally recommends, on the ground that fisheries are the nurseries of the royal navy.

Many of us are sure to have in mind the hissing scorn and trumpet-blast of encouragement that blend in the prophet's antitheses; vain the head bowed like the bulrush, and the sackcloth and ashes of ceremonial abasement, if for lack of our more righteous self-control bands of wickedness are tight round our brothers' hearts and burdens bow our brothers' backs.

Many of us will remember our quaint "Country Parson's" ingenious conceits:

Yet Lord instruct us to improve our Fast
By starving sin, and taking such repast
As may our faults control;
That every man may revel at his door,
Not in his parlour; banquetting the poor,
And among these his soul.

The "*Jejunium religiosum*" of Erasmus is "*abstinentia non tantum a cibo, sed et omnibus quæ corpus oblectant, ad impetrandum precibus Dei clementiam propter instantes aut prementes calamitates.*"

Yet to him that thinketh he standeth there is always an

“instans calamitas”; and to the Christian, life and Lent must be, in a sense, conterminous.

“The Shepherd of Hermas” is not now regarded as a work of such high authority as once was accorded to it; but, nevertheless, I will venture to conclude with part of the fifth Similitude of the third book:

“As I was fasting, and sitting down on a certain mountain, and giving thanks unto God for all the things that He had done unto me, behold I saw the shepherd, who was wont to converse with me, sitting by me, and saying unto me: What has brought thee hither thus early in the morning?

“I answered, Sir, to-day I keep a station.

“He answered, What is a station? I replied, It is a fast. He said, What is that fast? I answered, I fast, as I have been wont to do. Ye know not, said he, what it is to fast under God; nor is this a fast which ye fast, profiting nothing with God.

“Sir, said I, what makes you speak thus? He replied, I speak it because this is not the true fast which you think that you fast; but I will show you what that is which is a complete fast, and acceptable unto God.

“Hearken, said he, The Lord does not desire such a needless fast: for by fasting in this manner, thou advancest nothing in righteousness.

“But the true fast is this: Do nothing wickedly in thy life, but serve God with a pure mind; and keep His commandments, and walk according to His precepts, nor suffer any wicked desire to enter into the mind.

“But trust in the Lord, that if thou dost these things, and fearest Him, and abstainest from every evil work, thou shalt live unto God.

“If thou shalt do this, thou shalt perfect a great fast, and an acceptable one unto the Lord.”

BLOMFIELD JACKSON.

ART. IV.—DISESTABLISHMENT—WELSH AND IRISH.

THE vicissitudes of political parties have brought it about that the question of the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Welsh Church is again to the front. How, then, is the assault to be repulsed and the fortress rendered impregnable? This is a utilitarian age. Appeals to history or to sentiment, unless backed up by something more practical, will prove of little avail. The average voter does not greatly