

the covenant. Christ set His seal upon that Jewish Canon: "these" Scriptures, said He, "are they which bear witness of Me." And what more do we need? Not, surely, more definitions of inspiration; but only this, a better discernment of the Spirit.

τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιούν.

HERBERT E. RYLE.

NOTE.

\* \* \* This article was written last summer, and sent to the editor of THE EXPOSITOR towards the close of December, 1889. It has therefore no connexion with a recent discussion of the problems raised by Old Testament criticism. I venture however to refer readers interested in the subject to Canon Driver's article on "The Critical Study of the Old Testament" (*Contemporary Review*, Feb., 1890). Some of the points to which allusion is made in the course of my paper are there handled in detail, with the reverence, learning, and courage requisite for the task, and characteristic of the writer.—H. E. R., *April 12th*, 1890.

"FASTING" IN HOLY SCRIPTURE.

THE scope of this paper is strictly limited. It is an inquiry as to the amount and nature of the sanction which the practice of fasting receives from the authority of Holy Scripture.

With the definitions of fasting, in its connexion with religious institutions, we need not greatly trouble ourselves. In Scripture fasting means primarily the total abnegation of food for a particular period; and all later meanings are only modifications of this. In ecclesiastical literature a distinction has arisen between fasting and abstinence,—the latter being defined as "the depriving ourselves of *certain kinds of food and drink* in a rational way, and for the good of the soul"; whereas the former limits the *quantity* as

well as the kind of food. As early as the second century Tertullian says, "Exceptio *eduliorum quorundam* portionale jejunium est"; and Bellarmine, in his treatise on fasting, distinguishes between "a *spiritual* fast," which is abstinence from vices; "a *moral* fast," which is parsimony and temperance in food and drink; "a *natural* fast," which is abstinence from all food and drink taken in any way whatever; and "an *ecclesiastical* fast," which is abstinence from food in conformity with the rule of the Church. Passing over all such details, we will inquire only whether, and how far, fasting is to be regarded as a thing of Divine or permanent obligation.

We may omit from our inquiry all scriptural mention of the custom of the Jews, and other eastern nations, to fast at periods of bereavement, terror, and special humiliation. Such for instance was the fasting of Joshua and the elders of Israel after the defeat of Ai; of the Israelites in general after their humiliation by the tribe of Benjamin in the effort to avenge the infamy of Gibeah, and at Mizpeh under the pressure of Philistine tyranny; of David during the mortal sickness of his child by Bathsheba; of the Ninevites when called to repentance by Jonah; of Daniel and Esther and Nehemiah at important crises of their individual history. Such fasts belong to the natural instinct which finds expression among almost all nations in nearly every age. Whether, with Mr. Herbert Spencer, we trace the origin of voluntary fasting from the custom of lavish offerings of food to the dead; or, with Mr. E. B. Tylor, from the desire of superinducing abnormal mental conditions for the purpose of dreams and divinations; or, as seems more probable, from some dim desire to avert the wrath of Heaven by the simulation of an effect which is spontaneously caused by circumstances of mental agony, physical terror, or strong excitement—the practice is found to exist all over the world. Certain it is that fasting, at least

among priests, but also in many forms of religion among the laity, is connected with worship, alike in savage and civilized communities. Every one will see that moderation and temperance are infinitely better preparations for adoration than surfeiting and drunkenness. The Jewish priests, after the fatal irreverence shown by Nadab and Abihu, probably under the influence of wine, were forbidden altogether to touch strong drink during their periods of ministration. Such abstinence is obviously wise, and if a careful avoidance of any approach to gluttony or luxury is to be described as "fasting," it is obligatory on all men at all times; nor is it any encroachment on the sacredness of "the liberty wherewith God has made us free" if it be recommended to us more urgently at particular seasons.

It should however be observed that ecclesiastical fasting—the appointment of stated periods for abstention from all food or particular kinds of food—is so far from being *characteristic* of Judaism or of primitive Christianity, that both religions are conspicuous, in comparison with nearly every form of heathendom, by their rigid subordination, and (in some aspects) by their absolute disparagement of it.

Thus in the early sketch of the world's history and beliefs for two and a half millenniums, fasting is not once mentioned. The Patriarchs are presented to us as ideal types of faithful and god-fearing men, but we are not told that they ever thought it a religious duty to abstain from food.

In the remainder of the Pentateuch we find but three references to fasting. These are the fasting of Moses on Sinai; the fast of the Day of Atonement; and a private temporary vow of a woman "to afflict her soul" (Num. xxx. 13). To the latter we need not allude.

We are told that Moses, when he was with God on Sinai, fasted forty days and forty nights.<sup>1</sup> Probably we are meant to deduce from this allusion the high spiritual lesson that

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxxiv. 28. The fasting is not mentioned in Deut. x. 10.

man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God. So it is interpreted by the Jewish legends. It was fasting with ecstasy, and therefore stands in no relation to the fasting of affliction or humiliation. The Talmudists imply that self-denial was not the object of this fast, when they tell us that Moses was supported all the time by the music of the spheres. We must class this period of holy seclusion, as a training for special revelations or special struggles, with the forty days of Elijah and of our Lord in the wilderness. The allusions are altogether too vague and slight to permit of our insisting on any details. Nothing more seems to be implied than that they were sustained amid the privations of the wilderness. These fasts must have been altogether abnormal, nor can they enter, otherwise than in the most general manner, into the range of conduct intended for literal imitation. Indeed as regards our Lord, St. Mark only mentions the temptation; St. Matthew speaks of Him vaguely as "fasting" forty days and forty nights; while St. Luke says that "in those days He eat nothing":—but both the latter evangelists separate the fasting from what would be its natural effects, by saying distinctly that it was only "afterwards," only "when those days were accomplished," that He hungered. A long-continued fasting dissociated from hunger is not possible to us.

Moses only established one fast day in the whole year, on the tenth day of Tisri, the seventh month.<sup>1</sup> It was the great Day of Atonement, and on that day strict abstinence was enjoined from evening to evening. It was

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xvi. 29-34, xxiii. 27-32; Num. xxix. 7-12. In none of these passages is any mention made of abstinence from food. The phrases are, "Ye shall afflict your souls, and shall do no manner of work" (Lev. xvi. 29, xxiii. 27; Num. xxix. 7). The Mishna interprets this to mean that Jews were to eat nothing so large as a date, nor to drink, nor to wash from sunset to sunset. Fasting was treated by the later Jews as representing a part of the duty of afflicting the soul (comp. 1's. xxxv. 13, Isa. lviii. 3) on that day.

succeeded five days later by the most jubilant festival of the year, the Feast of Tabernacles.

Recent criticism however forces on us the question, Was this fast really of *Mosaic* origin? Can it, consistently with the sacred duty which we owe to truth, be assumed to have certainly belonged to the legislation of Sinai?

For of the great Day of Atonement—the day (*yoma*) of the year *par excellence*, the day which Philo strikingly calls “the feast of the Fast”—with all its gorgeous, stately, and deeply significant ceremonial, we find not the faintest trace throughout the long centuries of Jewish history, from the days of the Exodus down to the Exile. There is not so much as a hint that it was known to Joshua or to the Judges. Not even in the eminently sacerdotal book of Chronicles is it ever or anywhere indicated that its regulations were carried out by any king or by any priest. There is not a syllable from which we could infer that Eli, or Ahimelech, or Zadok, or Abiathar, or Jehoiada, or Hilkiah, observed it. David does not once refer to it in his Psalms, nor Solomon in his Proverbs, although in both there are so many passages in which an allusion to its striking symbols would have been singularly appropriate. Neither good Hezekiah nor good Josiah show a sign that they had heard of the expiation in the Holy of holies, or of the scape-goat for Azazel. Was there no one to remind poor leprosy-stricken Uzziah, when he was shut up in the House of the Unfortunate—was there no one to tell Manasseh in his heart-broken penitence—that a great day had been expressly provided every year as a propitiation for the sins of each soul in the whole nation?

“This,” some one will say, “is only the *argumentum e silentio*.”

It is astonishing how many there are who think that everything is settled by a trite phrase. A mathematician is said to have got safely through the Latin disputation for

his degree of doctor of divinity on the strength of constantly repeating *nego consequentiam*. No doubt the argument from silence is sometimes inapplicable, and may sometimes be pressed too far; but, supposing that in our English history for a thousand years, from the days of Egbert to those of Queen Victoria, Christmas or Yuletide was not once alluded to by any single English writer, religious or secular, would it not be regarded as a tolerably decisive proof that the observance of Christmas was, during that epoch, unknown?

But in the present case the silence is far more remarkable. For when we turn to the great Hebrew prophets, we find in almost all of them the triple strands of menace, exhortation, and promise; and there is scarcely a page of their writings which might not naturally have led them to urge upon the sinning, repenting, backsliding people the meaning of that great memorial fast-day, on which alone the high priest entered through the veil into the holiest place, and "made atonement for the children of Israel, because of all their sins, once in the year." Yet not one of the prophets makes any allusion to this annual cleansing and this isolated fast.<sup>1</sup>

Nor is this all. If there be one place more than another where, in accordance with every law of evidence, we should have looked for a special emphasis of insistence on this memorable day, it is in the ideal reconstruction of the temple, its priesthood, and its Levitical institutions which occupies the last nine chapters of Ezekiel. Yet while we there find a most minute description of the temple and its appurtenances, "*and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the laws thereof,*" yet of the Day of Atonement and its distinctive ceremonies we find no mention at all.

<sup>1</sup> In Jer. xxxvi. 6 "the fast" (A.V.) should be rendered "*a fast,*" *i.e.* one of the fasts proclaimed at a time of national distress (ver. 9).

And to crown our uncertainties we have now to face the strong critical arguments of Graf, and Colenso, and Kuenen, and Wellhausen, and Robertson Smith, and Driver, which tend so powerfully towards the conclusion that *in its present form* the whole Priestly Codex—to part of which the institution of the Day of Atonement belongs—cannot with any certainty be brought back to a period earlier than the Exile. The conclusion cannot indeed be ranked as yet among the accepted *data* of biblical criticism. But if in the supreme and sacred interests of truth, we are ultimately compelled to accept it, we shall be landed in the doubt whether the Divine legislation of *Sinai* established so much as a single day in the whole year to be set aside as a day for "afflicting the soul," to which the act of fasting was supposed to belong.

If we turn to the Psalmists and the Prophets as the deepest spiritual teachers of the Hebrews, they, in their turn, lend no countenance to the observance of ecclesiastical fasts. They point not indistinctly to beneficence and almsgiving as the fasting which God approves. "Is such the fast that I have chosen?" asks the later Isaiah in one of his bursts of impassioned eloquence—"the day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? . . . Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?"

And even in the late days of the return from the Exile, the prophet Zechariah, when consulted about fasts, has no word of commendation for them. The custom had grown up in Babylonia of keeping four days of fast in commemoration of four crises of the national catastrophe. Some residents at Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem-melech to ask the

prophet if they should be continued now that the people was restored. The only reply of Zechariah is, that their fasts had been nothing to God (Zech. vii. 5). He tells them to speak the truth, to execute right judgment, to think no evil in their hearts, and to love no false oath, and then their fasts should be turned into joyful feasts (Zech. viii. 16-23).

Joel indeed, when his people was afflicted by the horrible scourge of a plague of locusts, says, "Sanctify a fast," in which however the rending of the heart, not of the garments, is the essential thing. Indeed this view of the utter uselessness of fasting *in itself*, and apart from contrition and well-doing, became "almost a commonplace of Jewish theology." "So is it," says the son of Sirach, "with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again, and doeth the same: who will hear his prayer? or what doth his humbling profit him?"<sup>1</sup> But the special day of humiliation enjoined by Joel had no connexion with any prescribed or recurrent fast. It was a day of abstinence natural at a season of overwhelming misfortune. Moreover the drift of recent criticism seems to be in favour of regarding Joel, not by any means as the earliest of the prophets, but, on the contrary, as one who wrote at a late epoch. The whole tone of his allusions to liturgical service is that of the Exile, not that of Isaiah. It was during and after the Exile that fasting began to acquire a prominence among the Jews which it had never possessed in earlier times, and which gradually deepened into the habits of the Pharisee who boasted to God, "I fast twice in the week."

We come down to the New Testament. I once heard a young curate begin his address with the words, "Fasting is the distinctive characteristic of the disciples of Christ." Was not the remark—and something very like it is in these days constantly heard in Lenten sermons—a somewhat

<sup>1</sup> Ecclus. xxxiv. 25; see Taanith 16 a. Hamburger quotes further from Taanith 22, Nedarim 77, Sanhedrin 105, to the same effect.



daring challenge to the memories which recalled the question, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, *but Thy disciples fast not?*"<sup>1</sup>

Our Lord's reply to the challenge was, that the sons of the bridechamber cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them; "but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast in that day." The A.V. has it less accurately, "and then *shall* they fast," and one has heard the "*shall*" insisted on as though it were a command! But that error is venial in comparison with the vital mistake of those whom we so often hear speak as though we were to mean "the Christian dispensation" by "the days when the bridegroom shall be taken from them." It is part of the unhappy onesidedness which exclusively thrusts the image and conception of the dead Christ into the place which should be occupied in every Christian mind by the glad, perpetual presence of the living Christ. Most of the Fathers rightly explain the phrase as a reference to that brief time of anguish for the despairing Church during which the mortal body of Christ lay dead in the sepulchre. It was in memory of that sad hour that, as St. Irenæus tells us, the Lenten fast was commonly held in his time for one day or for two days or for forty hours.<sup>2</sup> It was reserved for other times to misunderstand so completely the meaning of the gospel as to overlook the truth that Christ is in every sense *nearer to, and more closely united with,* the true Church now, than He could be united with the disciples before the Comforter was sent, while yet they walked with Him by the Sea of Galilee or in the streets of Jerusalem. Surely one verse—if theology is to be reduced to a thing of "verses"—should have been sufficient to explode so deeply lying a misconception. For Christ said, "Nevertheless I

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ix. 14, 15; Mark ii. 18-20; Luke v. 33-35.

<sup>2</sup> Iren., *Ep. ad Vict. ap. Euseb. H.E.* v. 24, 1.

tell you the truth; *It is expedient for you that I go away*: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."<sup>1</sup>

There is but one other passage in which our Lord alludes to fasting,<sup>2</sup> namely, in St. Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount,<sup>3</sup> where He says, "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance," and the following verses. Here He was speaking in days when fasting had become common, and was frequently<sup>4</sup> practised by "the hypocrites" as well as by the sincere. Our Lord neither enjoins nor prohibits it. He leaves it as an *ἀδιάφορον*, in the same spirit which dictated the analogous words of St. Paul about clean and unclean meats: "He that eateth, eateth unto the Lord, for He giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, unto the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks." All that He says is, whenever we practise fasting, it must be practised to God in secret, not ostentatiously to men. It does not seem correct even to say that our Lord assumes that all His disciples will do it. He might have said exactly in the same way, "Whenever you take the vow of the Nazarene, do it humbly," whereby He would indeed have sanctioned the taking of such a vow, but no one would have argued that He made it of general, still less of universal, obligation.

With the exception of St. Luke's mention that Anna, a daughter of the old dispensation, practised "fastings," there is not a word more about fastings in the four gospels. St. John, the last and most spiritual voice of Divine revelation, in his five books does not so much as once mention it. Nor does St. Peter, the great *primus inter pares* of the

<sup>1</sup> John xvi. 7. Comp. Matt. xxviii. 20, "Lo, I am with you *always*"; John xiv. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Except the boast of the Pharisee, Luke xviii. 12: *νηστεύω δις τοῦ σαββάτου*.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. vi. 16-18.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. ix. 14, *πολλά*; Luke v. 33, *πυκνά*.

Apostles; nor does St. Jude; nor, Nazarite as he was, does St. James the Lord's brother; nor is it so much as alluded to in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Some will doubtless refer to Matthew xvii. 21, Mark ix. 29, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting," which with the texts which follow is quoted in most theological dictionaries as decisive on this subject. But if we turn to the text in the R.V., we shall see that, in that final utterance of the best scholarship of England, Matthew xvii. 21 has no existence, except in the margin, and the critical evidence which justifies its exclusion is to most scholars decisive. It has no place in **N** or **B**, in 33, in the *Codices Corbienses*, in the Coptic, Æthiopic, Sahidic, Jerusalem Syriac, and other versions, and it is virtually rejected by Eusebius. It almost certainly originated in Western and Syrian interpolation. If however it occurred in Mark ix. 29, this would make no difference. But turning to that verse, I find that in the R.V. it ends with the words, "but by prayer," and the two subsequent words, *καὶ νηστεία* (not to speak of variations of order in MSS. where they occur) are also absent from **N**, **B**, **k**, and in a quotation by St. Clement. There can therefore be little doubt on diplomatic as well as on paradiplomatic grounds, that the words are an interpolation due to the ascetic bias of many Christians in the early centuries. Seeing how strongly the current in favour of asceticism ran in the fourth and fifth centuries, it is inconceivable that the words would have been purposely omitted, but very conceivable indeed that they might have been inserted by a pious scribe.

That fasting existed among the early Christians on solemn special occasions is clear from the Acts, where it is mentioned on the occasion of ordinations, in Acts xiii. 3, xiv. 23. Nothing was more natural in a community predominantly Jewish, and still continuing the distinctively Jewish customs to such an extent that the phrase, "the Fast," is used with-

out explanation of the Day of Atonement.<sup>1</sup> Yet they are the *only* references to fasting in that first of ecclesiastical histories; for in Acts x. 30 the "fasting" of Cornelius is, without dispute, again due to the bias of Christian asceticism. It disappears without notice from the R.V., and is omitted in **N**, A, B, C, G, L, and the Vulgate and other versions.

We have now gone through the books of the New Testament, except the epistles of St. Paul. What injunctions to fast or recommendations of fasting occur in these thirteen priceless letters? Absolutely none. In 1 Corinthians vii. 5, "fasting" totally disappears from the R.V., being omitted by a host of MSS.<sup>2</sup> And this is the *only* time that the word occurs in St. Paul of ecclesiastical fastings, unless such are intended in 2 Corinthians vi. 5, xi. 27, which must be regarded as highly uncertain, and is not proved by the juxtaposition of "in hunger and thirst" in a passage so full of emotion.

It will, I think, be conceded, then, by all, that, apart from occasions when fasting is a natural concomitant of the humiliation which accompanies great trials, the practice of fasting occupies in Scripture a far less prominent place than it occupies in the pages of many ecclesiastical writers. In the New Testament it is nowhere commanded, nor is it once represented as a necessary means of grace. Undoubtedly it is a duty to observe a far greater moderation and temperance in matters of food and drink than is ordinarily practised, and there are few who would not derive benefit from an abstinence which fully meets the ordinary definitions of ecclesiastical fasting. On the other hand, it is to be feared that many take a mistaken view of its value and meritoriousness; that they carry it to extremes which

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxvii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> **N**, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, 9, 10, Vetus Lat. Vulg., etc., as well as in many versions and Fathers.

are detrimental to their work and usefulness, and that (as saints have confessed, and as physiologists are well aware) it acts on many temperaments as a direct stimulus to bodily temptations, instead of as a means of controlling them. When the latter is the case, it is surely better to substitute for physical fasting some other form of self-denial which is directly conducive to our own spiritual health and to the good of others. There is a note of deep warning in the words of St. Paul, which the R.V. first correctly rendered for English readers. "If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, Handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; *but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.*"

F. W. FARRAR.

### THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

#### XVII. THE NEW COVENANT (CHAP. IX. 15-28).

ONE is inclined to wonder that our author did not close his statement concerning the priestly ministry of Christ with the magnificent thought contained in chap. ix. 14, and pass on at once to the exhortation to Christian confidence and steadfastness which begins at chap. x. 19. The language of the exhortation (x. 19-23), fits exactly to the terms of the doctrinal statement (ix. 14), the free access in the blood of Jesus answering to the deliverance by the same blood from all that disables for the service of the living God, and the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience answering to the purging of the conscience from dead works. Indeed so close is the correspondence between the