

- The Lenten Season -

from time immemorial mankind has had special seasons for religious activities as we do of course for a great many so called secular activities. Many observances are reasonable. There are things that we do in summer that we do not or cannot do in winter. Some activities particularly fitted to spring and fall. Some things require particular dates like birthdays if we observe them - the 4th of July, 25th of Dec. 12 + 22nd of Feb. Easter; wedding anniversaries, picnics and so on. In Jewish history there were many set dates, that had particular religious significance. There were weekly, monthly, yearly, 7yr. and 50 year celebrations. Every sabbath day was a holy day unto the Lord. Once a week at least the people pursued to worship. They did not pursue their usual labor. It was a day of as complete rest from labor as it was possible to make it. It was never used for fun, games or the pursuit of pleasure. It was a day of meditation, prayer and worship. The new moon was also holy and a day of joy. The feast of the passover - celebrating their escape from bondage - was a day of great thanksgiving to Almighty God for their deliverance. ~~The 7th year~~ The day of atonement was a day when they tried to recall, remember and repent of their sins and determine what atonement they could and should make during the coming year. I think it is really too bad that this day was dropped from the calendar of Christians. But it was rather inconsistent with Christian theology - however it is to this day the most solemn and most rigidly observed fast of the Hebrew people all over the world. I imagine that there is nothing among them that so thoroughly cements the tie of brotherhood among them as the day of atonement.

I'm sure that if such a day had large significance to Xians. particularly protestants, religion would have a far more important place in our lives. Thus 1 yr in 7 was a holy year - and certain friendly and helpful observances were celebrated all the year - The 50th yr. was a yr. of Jubilee. In it all slaves were freed - mortgages of all kinds, notes and obligations of our kind were cancelled - Every family was reestablished in their ancestral homes - so that the religious system operated to promote equality and social justice and brotherhood.

The Xians. have had fewer feast and fast days. Sunday became the sabbath - and sabbath observance has always been deemed important - but it never did have the significance it had in Jewry. Jesus himself attacked the observance of it in his day - too rigorous, too formal; it was made a substitute for real righteousness. What does idleness on the sabbath amount to if all the rest of the week men feel they have some additional license to rob, plunder, oppress, cheat, defraud because they have kept the sabbath - If they are licensed to more evil of all kinds?

Any good thing can be and every good thing has been abused. Jesus clearly says that Sabbath observance as practiced in his day was not making men, more holy - in fact they had substituted Sabbath observance for righteousness, justice, and the refinement of character - One would have thought in his day that man was made to keep the Sabbath instead of the Sabbath set aside for the improvement of men.

I think there can be no doubt but that these special observances & religious rites are the most powerful influences in the religious life of men. Religion, at least organized religion, could not endure without them. The church or temple that pays the most attention to them is the strongest. If every body in Albion were a Universalist but never used holy days as Sabbaths, Xmas, Easter & Lent for a special religious activity - there would soon be no church in Albion.

One marvels at the Catholic Ch. its many holy days, saints days its sabbath observances. We have some times made fun of it sneered - pitied the daunted victims of superstition - yet we see it was strong as the yrs. go by. Religion means more to them.

Lent is therefore a ^{special} time for self discipline - During this season, when so many others are working with greater zeal for spiritual culture, we should & must if wise and sensible take stock of our whole manner of life - and correct as we can, our bad habits and customs - New Yrs. day calls for fresh resolutions most of which are speedily forgotten - Lent also calls for something of the kind - only this goes over a period of 40 days, in which we are constantly reminded that it is Lent. It lasts long enough to make & work real improvement in our lives, if we will but observe it sensibly.

In any well considered observance of Lent the Church will most certainly come into our calculations. In Xian lands any general religious festival cannot but affect the Church. In India the temples of Buddha & Vishnu - Mahomedian mosques would show ^{marked} activity. A proper observance, one that amounted to anything would certainly do us all good. A little more Xian. activity would certainly increase our joy and our satisfactions - We would be better pleased with ourselves, I'm sure - many a shiftery fault could be corrected - Many an old infirmity might be cured. If we pay due attention to this season

By the way do you realize what Lent commemorates? It is the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness. A little time spent in the desert ^{alone with P.} seems to be the best preparation for a prophet or for the religious life. All the prophets seem to have been shepherds - in the mts. or deserts. Moses spent many years in the wilderness of Sinai - Elijah & Elisha fled to Mt. Carmel. John lived in the wilderness & fed on locusts & wild honey - Paul after his conversion went out into the wilderness for 3 yrs - Jesus like the others - retired into the wilderness for 40 days - A very special season for meditation - to think things thru to make up his mind - to lay out a program for life. When he had spent his 40 days - he knew - what he would do - how he would live - what he wanted to teach.

We may not retire to a wilderness - but I have no doubt whatever that if we could and would - we would find illumination would approach nearer to reality.

It is freely observed in protestant circles that presently the catholic church will triumph over all others and there will be no protestant church. This would of course be most unfortunate for the world - a set back into the darkness of the middle ages. But it is certain that only those churches - whose religious observances have real and deep meaning to their communicants will long survive. Only those churches who can have or secure the loyalty and necessary sacrifice of their people are worth survival. They are useless anyway.

Liberalism would and does make all these forms and ceremonies rational, intelligent. It would free them all from superstitions take religion out of the realm of myth, legend, folklore and make it appeal to man's highest faculty, his reason. Liberalism offers all a free and noble program of life - calculated on belief to produce the very highest type of character, the most just and useful relationships between men the world over. It would have peace on earth, good will to all men. It would make for brotherhood breaking down every barrier of race, creed, color, sex or nationality. But to realize any of its programs demands on the part of liberals as great even a greater devotion to our programs than others have for theirs.

We have entered into Lent - a period set aside by almost universal custom for special communion, devotion and sacrifice for our religious ideals. I appeal to you to make something of it. Some thoughtlessly do such small things and feel so good about it. They have stopped eating peanuts, pie, candy, greasy things, pasting of all kinds and are going to discipline their lives by eating only what is good for them during Lent. Well and good - might well observe such rules year around. But such pickanure things are a most trivial and rather absurd use of a religious festival. An observance of some self denial in the interest of physical health is good I find no fault with it - but the great objective is spiritual, is to do something to and for the soul of us. It leads up to the great sacrifice of Christ - and concludes with his triumph, his glorification. Naturally it is a period of self denial - for real self denial & discipline is good for the soul. No soul could be great - or beautiful or strong unless it has the power to make us do the things we ought to do.