

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1891.

LENT IS HERE!

What to Do and Not to Do.

WAYS OF KEEPING IT.

Bright People Write about it from Many Standpoints.

A SEASON FOR SELF DENIAL FOR ALL.

Some Curious Customs of Observing Lent Recounted by "Progress" Correspondents—Rev. L. G. Stevens and "Noel Pilgrim's" Sound Advice on the Subject.

One of the readers of PROGRESS asked last week for some information about Lent, and how it should be observed, as well as some of the customs that have surrounded its observance.

TOO OLD FOR ORIGINALITY.

Lent Affords an Opportunity to Rest the Mind and Recruit the Body.

How can any one be expected to have "an original opinion upon the subject" of Lent at this advanced stage of its existence? I think that every new idea thereupon must long since have become feeble through age and long usage.

The process agrees even less with the sterner portions of humanity, I think. His favorite concession to conscience consists in renouncing the noxious weed, whereby assisting his family to keep Lent with great effectiveness.

Notwithstanding, however, the discrepancies in the conduct of those "who profess and call themselves Christians," I believe Lent to be a useful and beneficial institution, merely from a worldly point of view. It interrupts the rush of social

duties and pleasures, and gives a little time for the cultivation of the mind, even if the soul be rather neglected. One has no time for reading or thinking when plunged in the whirlpool of visits, dances, and kindred delightful if demoralizing festivities, and the comparative quiet and rest of the Lenten season must serve to strengthen both mind and body for the soon-recurring strains.

This is, of course, regarding the subject merely from the lower plane. Others will, perhaps, enlarge upon it from the higher standpoint. I don't think I can. Still less can I counsel any one "what to do, or not to do."

SELFISHNESS HAS MUCH TO DO.

With Some People's Observance of Lent—Good Advice For the Season.

Since self is the strongest impulse in most men, selfishness is sure to creep into religion. If it is—as seems to be the case,—selfishness that leads people to disregard and give up the observance of Lent and fast days, the same quality surely, misleads many into an observance of the season that is false and mean, if not silly, or ridiculous. In order to observe Lent aright we must have well in sight what it commemorates.

Lent keepers are apt to regard the season in a selfish way. What shall I gain from this; what spiritual refreshment; what religious vigor; what victory over besetting sins; and, sometimes, alas! what self-satisfaction and praise of men. It is true, that times of self-restraint and abstinence are most useful, and perhaps needful, but such times can hardly be restricted to particular seasons.

"I said that darkness should content my soul," God said, "Let there be light!" I said the night should see me reach the goal, Instead came dawning bright.

To keep Lent well is, it seems to me, to observe it as an act of sympathy with Him who first kept Lent for our sakes. We are sober and self-denying, careful in religious exercises, because He at this time underwent His voluntary act of fasting in the wilderness, when upon Him who bore "the iniquities of us all" was laid the full load of the world's loneliness, and poverty, and pain. We throw in with His—for His

sake—our various acts of self-denial and devotion, as a tribute to Him of His sufficiency, His glory, and His love.

We may justly think then, that while the church may lay down general principles, no two persons can keep Lent in just the same way. In the above spirit, and without ostentation or any talk about it, the way of self-denial and curtailment of things lawful, but not then expedient, will with a little consideration become plain.

To one woman it is dress, to another it is society, to another too many novels, to another the afternoons round of gossiping visits. In the matter of food, if one is anxious to fast, in the right spirit, let him put himself to the test of taking half a meal. If he can do this without rattling the crockery, insulting the patient partner of his home, slamming the door and coming home early, and like a spring bear to his next meal, he may consider himself a subject for abstinence.

It is amusing to hear good people talk about the various little ways of self-affliction they assume, but really the worst part is the talking, for we know well it is the having or not having of little things that makes up the comfort or discomfort of life.

The most striking case I ever heard of was that of the young woman who wouldn't put her hair in curl papers during Lent. She went about with a Zulu-like verandah of front hair, to every one's amazement, and bewilderment, and no doubt her own great inward edification and development.

I recollect a rather pretty little story which indicates the real *Cyax*, and may be a useful illustration. A teacher was endeavoring to show to her class of little girls what "taking up the cross" meant; she patiently told them it was the hard thing which ought to be done readily and cheerfully, etc. Then she invited anyone to state what her particular "cross" seemed to be.

THE SPIRIT VERSUS THE FLESH.

"Astra" is Amusing and Solemn—The True Meaning of Lent.

Lent is a penitential season! That is about the only point concerning the great church fast upon which we all seem to be thoroughly agreed! Indeed the amount of ignorance prevalent upon this important subject, even among good church people is simply surprising. It is not many months since I had the pleasure of hearing a lady whom I imagined knew much more about church matters than I did myself, argue fiercely for half an hour about the proper observance of Good Friday, and then turn suddenly round to her opponent with a puzzled look and ask, "What is Good Friday the anniversary of, anyway? What do we keep it for?"

Ash Wednesday means, for only too many

of us a day, when we have fish for dinner instead of meat, and the change is so agreeable to our palates that we almost wish it could be Ash Wednesday all the time.

Then, in due season Good Friday arrives, and we come down to breakfast hungry, but sternly resolute; coffee without milk, and a crust of bread form the staples of our banquet, and it we leave the table with a very vacant feeling in the region of our vest, there is a glow of conscious rectitude about our hearts that goes a long way towards filling the vacuum, but which fades gradually, until, towards 11 o'clock, it is all vacuum, and no glow.

I knew a girl once. I knew her very well indeed—because I happened to be the girl myself—who undertook to give up butter during Lent, Sundays excepted. Of course she kept it from Ash Wednesday till the first Monday afterwards, and then she fell from grace, so far that she never got back again. Life without butter was an arid wilderness, with only six oases in sight, and the distance between these spots of verdure was too great to be spanned by human appetite, so she gave up the effort in despair, and the latter state of that girl, who had put her hand to the plow and turned back, was worse than the first.

What do I think of Lent, do you ask? I think of it as an all too brief season when we sinners try for a while to follow in our Lord's footsteps, when we should try in our weak way to bear even a faint shadow of His sorrow and suffering, to be—as I heard an eloquent preacher say—a short time ago—"Christlike for Christ's sake," to deny ourselves a few of the pleasures and vanities of the world, in memory of His forty days of anguish, and thereby draw a little nearer to Him; to imitate Him if ever so feebly, to say in our hearts, "Thou hast done all things for us, oh Lord, this little week effort we make for Thy dear sake, praying that Thou wilt accept our sacrifice."

This, I think, is my idea of keeping Lent in the true spirit, not of ostentatiously wearing plain garments, and praying in fashionable churches, but of trying to come a little closer to God in our inmost hearts.

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE SEASON.

Rev. L. G. Stevens' Suggestions as to "What to Do in Lent."

The season of Lent makes no apology for its existence. It grew naturally, in response to a demand of the Christian consciousness, out of the feeling that, if Christians were to be in the proper state of mind to enter into the spiritual joys of Easter, they must prepare themselves for it beforehand by more earnest and faithful Christian thinking and living.

Originally it probably lasted "forty hours"—the time during which our Lord was under the power of death. By degrees the time was enlarged, till in the seventh century, it extended to forty days—the period that our Lord spent in the wilderness. This solemn season—marked by special efforts towards penitence, self-discipline and devotion—is very generally observed by Anglican, Lutheran, Protestant Episcopal, Roman and Greek churches, representing as they do more than two-thirds of those "who profess and call themselves "Christians."

In these churches it is a special "revival season," and, like revival seasons outside of those churches which hold to the "Historic Episcopate," it is doubtless often abused by a spirit of formalism, by forced rather than spontaneous emotionalism, and by frothy sentimentalism. Yet the mighty

fact remains that two-thirds of the Christian world is professedly on its knees during this season; the fact remains that in spite of all revival drawbacks and lapses, it is a season blessed of God for the renewing of our vows, the enlarging of our sympathies, and the strengthening of our faith.

I am not disposed to question, with your correspondent, whether "outside of the churches there is much real self-denial, or rather a show of it." I believe that outside, as well as inside, there is much "real self-denial," it not "a show of it." Your correspondent asks "what she is supposed to do and what not to do."

LET FORMS AND RITUALS ALONE.

Do The Duty Next Thee Lies—That is Enough Ground to Cover.

Lent, my inquiring sister (for masculine omniscience would never profess ignorance on this or any other subject), is doubtless so named from the Latin *lentus*, slow, because among its observers, Anglican and Roman, this fast time is—paradoxically—the slowest time in the year.

With some it takes the place of the Dissenters' revival—a brief but violent attack of religious fervor, brought on by the dissipation preceding it, and giving a zest to that following. The symptoms are devout attendance on all church services and a rigid self-denial, which, if piled on as thickly for any great length of time, ought to entitle the devotee to translation to celestial regions; while the same quality boiled down and spread over the entire year would render her (tis seldom *him*) a very pleasant person to live with here below.

With others, more practical or more worldly-minded, this is the season in which exhausted vitality is strengthened, ward-rooms renovated, and finances replenished.

The ways in which to keep Lent are as many and various as the temperaments of those who observe it. To many of us, as we look on, they savour less of the sublime than the ridiculous.

Take my advice, my friend, and in this season (as in the rest of the year) let forms and rituals alone, and "do the duty next thee lies." That word "duty," defined by the school-boy as "the thing we don't want to do," covers enough ground, to my mind, without these extra and frantic efforts at self-denial for the space of some forty days.

Concerning "Helpmeet."

We object to the word "helpmeet." The only excuse for its use is its usage by and among ignorant people. When God saw that it was not good for man to be alone He said: "I will make him a help meet for him." These words, recurring in Holy Writ, have been confounded by the careless and unthinking, and the result is that abomination, helpmeet.

Christ bade the Pharisees and Sadducees "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." If we are to have helpmeet, why should we not also have fruitmeet?

The confusion of ideas induced by the juxtaposition of certain words is felicitously illustrated by the old story of the pastor who, rising in his pulpit, said:

"Brethren, I take for my text to-day a part of the fifteenth verse of the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark: 'Topknot go down!'"—Chicago News.

Faint Heart.

"Ever had your life insured, old fellow?" "No. Companies won't take me. Heart action too feeble. Nobody to insure my life for, anyhow."

"Ain't you married?" "No. Heart action too feeble for that too."—Chicago Tribune.

Explanatory.

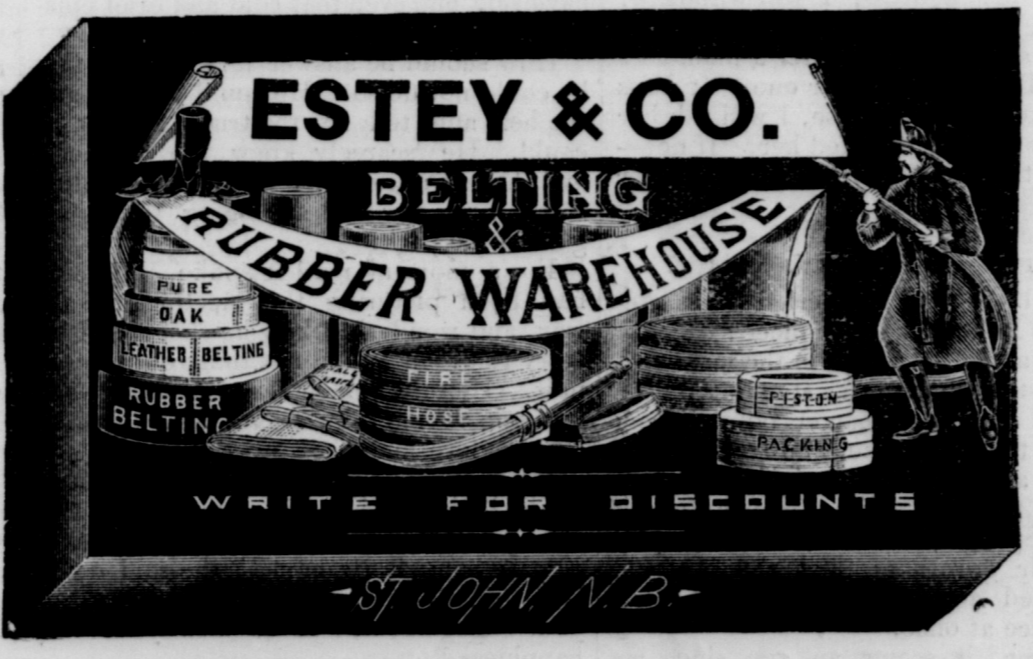
Foreman—The men have all struck this morning, sir. What shall we do? Head of Firm—Put a sign out. Foreman—What had I better put on the sign? Head of Firm—"Hands off."—America.

Vain Hope.

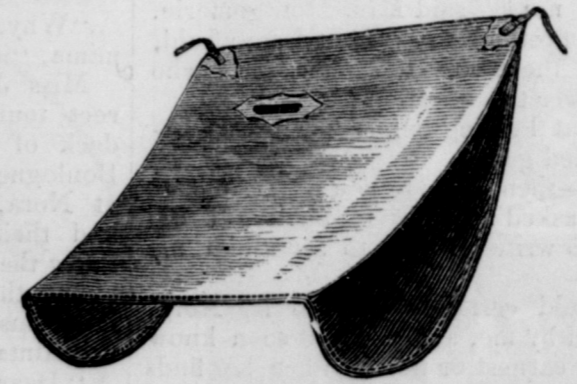
Fond mother—John, do you know Gerie has arranged a little piece for the piano? Fond father—Good! Peace for the piano means peace for all of us.—Ez.



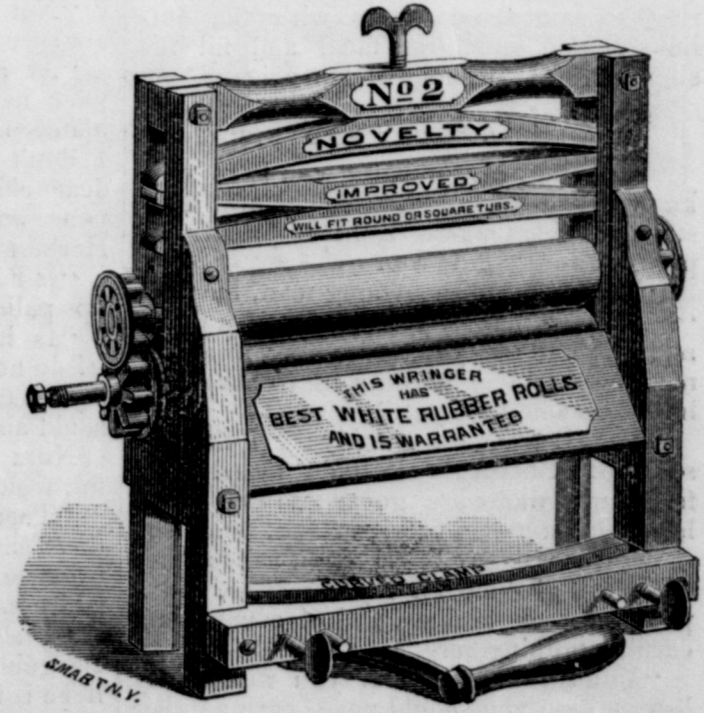
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