The History Of Lent

From “The Liturgical Year” by Dom Gueranger

By Dom Gueranger.
Catholic Truth Society of Oregon No.lit056 (1956)

[Dom Guéranger, abbot of Solesmes from 1837-1875, was one of the leading monastics and liturgists of his generation, and his writings were highly influential both in France and abroad. He is perhaps best known today through the pages of his L'Année Liturgique - The Liturgical Year - which he began in 1841 in order to make the riches of the liturgy more widely known by the faithful. In fifteen volumes (which he did not live to complete), he follows the cycle of the liturgical year, illuminating the traditional liturgy with interpretations, commentaries, and riches collected from other liturgies both of Eastern and Western Christendom. His cause for beatification is under consideration in Rome. Of necessity, his writings refer to the liturgy of Saint Pius V, but his writings provided much of the groundwork for liturgical renewal which reached its pinnacle under Pope Paul VI and the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. What he wrote will surely assist the Catholic reader to understand what Lent was in the ages of faith. Note well what he writes about the good Catholic undertaking prayer, fasting, abstinence and almsgiving during Lent, in a spirit of sacrifice as we walk with Our Lord and Savior. Note how he points out how generous the disciplines of the Church are but note too, his words of warning against too much laxity on our spiritual journey. How much more are the Church’s disciplines generous today! How much more, then, should we endeavor to live our Lent in a true spirit of repentance and conversion!]

THE forty days' fast, which we call Lent, is the Church's preparation for Easter, and was instituted at the very commencement of Christianity. [Footnote from the English Translator: In most languages, the name given to this fast expresses the number of the days, forty. But our word Lent signifies the Spring-fast; for ‘Lenten-tide’, in the ancient English-Saxon language, was the son of Spring.]

Our blessed Lord Himself sanctioned it by fasting forty days and forty nights in the desert; and though He would not impose it on the world by an express commandment (which, in that case, could not have been open to the power of dispensation), yet He showed plainly enough, by His own example, that fasting, which God had so frequently ordered in the old Law, was to be also practiced by the children of the new.

The disciples of Saint John the Baptist came, one day, to Jesus, and said to Him: 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them: 'Can the children of the Bridegroom mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast.' [Saint Matthew, 9:14-15.]

Hence, we find it mentioned, in the Acts of the Apostles, how the disciples of our Lord, after the foundation of the Church, applied themselves to fasting. In their Epistles, also, they recommended it to the faithful. Nor could it be otherwise. Though the divine mysteries whereby our Savior wrought

our redemption have been consummated, yet are we still sinners: and where there is sin, there must be expiation.

The apostles, therefore, legislated for our weakness, by instituting, at the very commencement of the Christian Church, that the solemnity of Easter should be preceded by a universal fast; and it was only natural that they should have made this period of penance to consist of forty days, seeing that our divine Master had consecrated that number by His own fast. Saint Jerome, [Epistle 27 to Marcella,] Saint Leo the Great, [Sermon 2, 5.9 ‘de Quadragesima’,] Saint Cyril of Alexandria, [Paschal Homily,] Saint Isidore of Seville, [‘Of Ecclesiastical Works’, book 6, chapter 19,] and others of the holy fathers, assure us that Lent was instituted by the apostles, although, at the commencement, there was not any uniform way of observing it.

We have already seen, {in our earlier chapters on 'Septuagesima’, the time preceding Lent,} that the Orientals begin their Lent much earlier than the Latins, owing to their custom of never fasting on Saturdays (or, in some places, even on Thursdays). They are, consequently, obliged, in order to make up the forty days, to begin the Lenten fast on the Monday preceding our Sexagesima Sunday, the second Sunday preceding Ash Wednesday. Exceptions of this kind do but prove the rule. We have also shown how the Latin Church - which, even so late as the sixth century, kept only thirty-six fasting days during the six weeks of Lent (for the Church has never allowed Sundays to be kept as days of fast) - thought proper to add, later on, the last four days of Quinquagesima, (the week immediately before the first Sunday of Lent,) in order that her Lent might contain exactly forty days of fast.

The whole subject of Lent has been so often and so fully treated that we shall abridge, as much as possible, the history we are now giving. The nature of our work forbids us to do more than insert what is essential for entering into the spirit of each season. God grant that we may succeed in showing to the faithful the importance of the holy institution of Lent! Its influence on the spiritual life, and on the very salvation, of each one among us, can never be over-rated.

Lent, then, is a time consecrated in an especial manner to penance; and this penance is mainly practiced by fasting. Fasting is an abstinence, which man voluntarily imposes upon himself as an expiation for sin, and which, during Lent, is practiced in obedience to the general law of the Church. According to the actual discipline of the western Church, the fast of Lent is not more rigorous than that prescribed for the vigils of certain feasts, and for the Ember Days which are the four separate sets of three days within the same week — specifically, the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday — roughly equidistant in the circuit of the year, that were [formerly] set aside for fasting. But Lenten fasting is kept up for forty successive days, with the single interruption of the intervening Sundays.

We deem it unnecessary to show the importance and advantages of fasting. The sacred Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, are filled with the praises of this holy practice. The traditions of every nation of the world testify the universal veneration in which it has ever been held; for there is not a people or a religion, how much soever it may have lost the purity of primitive traditions, which is not impressed with this conviction — that man may appease his God by subjecting his body to penance.

Saint Basil, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Jerome, and Saint Gregory the Great, make the remark, that the commandment put upon our first parents in the earthly paradise was one of abstinence; and that it was by their not exercising this virtue, that they brought every kind of evil upon themselves

and upon us their children. The life of privation, which the kind of creation had thenceforward to lead on the earth (for the earth was to yield him nothing of its own natural growth, save thorns and thistles), was the clearest possible exemplification of the law of penance imposed by the anger of God on rebellious man.

During the two thousand and more years, according to Biblical scholars, which preceded the deluge, men had no other food than the fruits of the earth, and these were obtained only by the toil of hard labor. But when God, as we have already observed, mercifully shortened man's life that so he might have less time and power for sin, He permitted him to eat the flesh of animals, as an additional nourishment in that state of deteriorated strength. It was then, also, that Noah, guided by a divine inspiration, extracted the juice of the grape, which thus formed a second stay for human debility.

Fasting, then, is abstinence from such nourishments as these, which were permitted for the support of bodily strength. And firstly, it consists in abstinence from flesh-meat, because this food was given to man by God out of condescension to his weakness, and not as one absolutely essential for the maintenance of life. Its privation, greater or less according to the regulations of the Church, is essential to the very notion of fasting. For many centuries, eggs and milk-meats were not allowed, because they come under the class of animal food; even to this day, they are forbidden in the eastern Churches.

In the early ages of Christianity, fasting included also abstinence from wine, as we learn from Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, [Catechetics 4,] Saint Basil, [Homily 1, ‘De Jejunio,] Saint John Chrysostom, [Homily 4, To the People of Antioch,] Theophilus of Alexandria, [‘Litt. Pasch. 3,] and others. In the west, this custom soon fell into disuse. The eastern Christians kept it up much longer, but even with them, it has ceased to be considered as obligatory.

Lastly, fasting includes the depriving ourselves of some portion of our ordinary food, inasmuch as it allows only one meal during the day. Though the modifications introduced from age to age in the discipline of Lent are very numerous, yet the points we have here mentioned belong to the very essence of fasting, as is evident from the universal practice of the Church.

It was the custom with the Jews, in the old Law, not to take the one meal, allowed on fasting days, till sunset. The Christian Church adopted the same custom. It was scrupulously practiced, for many centuries, even in our western countries. But about the ninth century, some relaxation began to be introduced in the Latin Church. Thus we have a capitularium of Theodulph, bishop of Orleans, who lived at that period, protesting against the practice, which some had, of taking their repast at the hour of None, that is to say, about three o'clock in the afternoon. [Capitularium, 39, Labbe. Concil. Volume 8.] The relaxation, however, gradually spread; for, in the tenth century, we find the celebrated Ratherius, bishop of Verona, acknowledging that the faithful had permission to break their fast at the hour of None. [Sermon 1. ‘De Quadragesima, D'Achery, Spicilegium, volume 2.] We meet with a sort of reclamation made as late as the eleventh century, by a Council held at Rouen, which forbids the faithful to take their repast before Vespers shall have been begun in the church, at the end of None; [Orderic, Vital, Histor. Eccles., Book 4,] but this shows us that the custom had already begun of anticipating the hour of Vespers, in order that the faithful might take their meal earlier in the day.

Up to within a short period before this time, (the tenth century,) it had been the custom not to celebrate Mass, on days of fasting, until the Office of None had been sung, which was about three o'clock in the afternoon; and, also, not to sing Vespers till sunset. When the discipline regarding

fasting began to relax, the Church still retained the order of her Offices, which had been handed down from the earliest times. The only change she made was to anticipate the hour for Vespers; and this entailed the celebration of Mass and None much earlier in the day; so early, indeed, that, when custom had so prevailed as to authorize the faithful taking their repast at midday, all the Offices, even the Vespers, were over before that hour.

In the twelfth century, the custom of breaking one's fast at the hour of None everywhere prevailed, as we learn from Hugh of Saint-Victor; [‘On the Rule of Saint Augustine, chapter 3,] and in the thirteenth century, it was sanctioned by the teaching of the Schoolmen. Alexander Hales declares most expressly that such a custom was lawful; [see the Summa, Part 4, Question 28, article 2,] and Saint Thomas Aquinas is equally decided in the same opinion. [See the Summa, the second part of the Second Part, especially Question 147.]

But even the fast till None — i.e., three o'clock — was found too severe; and a still further relaxation was considered to be necessary. At the close of the thirteenth century, we have the celebrated Franciscan, Richard of Middleton, teaching that those who break their fast at the hour of Sext — i.e., midday — are not to be considered as transgressing the precept of the Church; and the reason he gives is this: that the custom of doing so had already prevailed in many places, and that fasting does not consist so much in the lateness of the hour at which the faithful take their refreshment, as in their taking but one meal during the twenty-four hours. [In 4 Dist 15, article 3, Question 8; Summa, the second part of the Second Part, Question 147, article 7.]

The fourteenth century gave weight, both by universal custom and theological authority, to the opinion held by Richard of Middleton. It will, perhaps, suffice if we quote the learned Dominican, Durandus, bishop of Meaux, who says that there can be no doubt as to the lawfulness of taking one's repast at midday; and he adds that such was then the custom observed by the Pope, and Cardinals, and even the religious Orders. [In 4 Dist. 15, Question 9, article 7.] We cannot, therefore, be surprised at finding this opinion maintained, in the fifteenth century, by such grave authors as Saint Antoninus, Cardinal Cajetan, and others. Alexander Hales and Saint Thomas sought to prevent the relaxation going beyond the hour of None; but their zeal was disappointed, and the present [nineteenth century] discipline was established, we might almost say, during their lifetime.

But whilst this relaxation of taking the repast so early in the day as twelve o'clock rendered fasting less difficult in one way, it made it more severe in another. The body grew exhausted by the labors of the long second half of the twenty-four hours; and the meal, that formerly closed the day, and satisfied the cravings of fatigue, had been already taken. It was found necessary to grant some refreshment for the evening, and it was called a collation. The word was taken from the Benedictine rule, which, for long centuries before this change in the Lenten observance, had allowed a monastic collation. Saint Benedict's rule prescribed a great many fasts, over and above the ecclesiastical fast of Lent; but it made this great distinction between the two: that whilst Lent obliged the monks, as well as the rest of the faithful, to abstain from food till sunset, these monastic fasts allowed the repast to be taken at the hour of None. But, as the monks had heavy manual labor during the summer and autumn months (which was the very time when these fasts till None occurred several days of each week, and, indeed, every day from September 14), the abbot was allowed by the rule to grant his religious permission to take a small measure of wine before Compline or Night Prayer, as a refreshment after the fatigues of the afternoon. It was taken by all at the same time, during the evening reading which was called conference (in Latin, collatio) because it was mostly taken from

the celebrated 'Conferences' (Collationes) of Cassian. Hence, this evening monastic refreshment took the name of collation.

We find the Assembly, or Chapter of Aix-la-Chapelle, held in 817, extending this indulgence even to the Lenten fast, on account of the great fatigue entailed by the offices, which the monks had to celebrate during this holy season. But experience showed that, unless something solid were allowed to be taken together with the wine, the evening collation would be an injury to the health of many of the religious; accordingly, towards the close of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century, the usage was introduced of taking a morsel of bread with the collation-beverage.

As a matter of course, these mitigations of the ancient severity of fasting soon found their way from the cloister into the world. The custom of taking something to drink on fasting days, out of the time of the repast, was gradually established; and even so early as the thirteenth century, we have Saint Thomas of Aquin discussing the question, whether or not drink is to be considered as a breaking of the precept of fasting. [Summa, the second part of the Second Part, Question 147, article 6, and In 4 Dist.] He answers in the negative; and yet he does not allow that anything solid may be taken with the drink. But when it had become the universal practice (as it did in the latter part of the thirteenth century, and still more fixedly during the whole of the fourteenth) that the one meal on fasting days was taken at midday, a mere beverage was found insufficient to give support, and bread, herbs, fruits, etc., were added. Such was the practice, both in the world and in the cloister. It was, however, clearly understood by all, that these eatables were not to be taken in such quantity as to turn the collation into a second meal.

Thus did the decay of piety, and the general deterioration of bodily strength among the people of the western nations, infringe on the primitive observance of fasting. To make our history of these humiliating changes anything like complete, we must mention one more relaxation. For several centuries, abstinence from flesh-meat included likewise the prohibition of all animal food, with the single exception of fish, which, on account of its cold nature, as also for several mystical reasons, founded on the sacred Scriptures, was always permitted to be taken by those who fasted. Every sort of milk-meat was forbidden.

Dating from the ninth century, the custom of eating milk-meats during Lent began to be prevalent in western Europe, more especially in Germany and the northern countries. The Council of Kedlimberg, held in the eleventh century, made an effort to put a stop to the practice as an abuse; but without effect. [Labbe, Concil. Volume 10.] These Churches maintained that they were in the right, and defended their custom by the dispensations (though, in reality, only temporary ones) granted them by several sovereign Pontiffs: the dispute ended by their being left peaceably to enjoy what they claimed.

The Churches of France resisted this innovation up to the sixteenth century; but in the seventeenth, they too yielded, and milk-meats were taken during Lent, throughout the whole kingdom.

As some reparation for this breach of ancient discipline, the city of Paris instituted a solemn rite, whereby she wished to signify her regret at being obliged to such a relaxation.

On Quinquagesima Sunday, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, all the different parishes went in procession to the church of Notre Dame. The Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, and Augustinians, took part in the procession. The metropolitan Chapter, and the four parishes that were subject to it, held, on the same day, a Station in the courtyard of the palace, and sang an anthem before the relic of the true cross, which was exposed in the Sainte Chapelle, the ‘Holy Chapel’ on

the Ile de la Cite. These pious usages, which were intended to remind the people of the difference between the past and the present observance of Lent, continued to be practiced till the French Revolution.

But this grant for the eating of milk-meats during Lent did not include eggs. Here the ancient discipline was maintained, at least this far, that eggs were not allowed, save by an Indult, which had to be renewed each year. Invariably do we find the Church seeking, out of anxiety for the spiritual advantage of her children, to maintain all she can of those penitential observances, whereby they may satisfy divine justice. It was with this intention that Pope Benedict XIV, alarmed at the excessive facility wherewith dispensations were then obtained, renewed, by a solemn Constitution dated June 10, 1745, the prohibition of eating fish and meat, at the same meal, on fasting days.

The same Pope, whose spirit of moderation has never been called in question, had no sooner ascended the papal throne, than he addressed an encyclical letter to the bishops of the Catholic world, expressing his heartfelt grief at seeing the great relaxation that was introduced among the faithful by indiscreet and unnecessary dispensations. The letter is dated May 30, 1741.

We extract from it the following passage: 'The observance of Lent is the very badge of the Christian warfare. By it, we prove ourselves not to be enemies of the cross of Christ. By it, we avert the scourges of divine justice. By it, we gain strength against the princes of darkness, for it shields us with heavenly help. Should mankind grow remiss in their observance of Lent, it would be a detriment to God's glory, a disgrace to the Catholic religion, and a danger to Christian souls. Neither can it be doubted that such negligence would become the source of misery to the world, of public calamity, and of private woe.' [Constitution: Non ambigimus.]

More than a hundred years have elapsed since this solemn warning of the Vicar of Christ was given to the world {writes Gueranger in 1850}; and during that time, the relaxation he inveighed against has gone on gradually increasing. How few Christians do we meet who are strict observers of Lent, even in its present mild form!

{Rev. Father Shepherd, O.S.B., the 1867 translator added the following footnote: The Regulations of the Church with regard to Fasting and Abstinence have been revised in accordance with present circumstances and conditions. The Indult granted each Lent in former years is no longer necessary, and all are required to observe the common law of the Church.

The 1920 editor added this further note: By the new code of Canon Law, a distinction is made between fasting and abstinence.

All the week days of Lent, the Ember Days and some vigils are days of fasting, but meat is allowed at the full meal except on Wednesdays and Fridays and the Ember Days in Lent.}

{The current (2012) regulations concerning Lenten fasting and abstinence for Catholics in general are now considerably mitigated. The United States regulations may be considered as typical:

- Abstinence from all meat is to be observed by all Catholics 14 years old and older on Ash Wednesday and on all Fridays of Lent.
- Fasting is to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday by all Catholics who are 18 years of age but not yet 59.

All Catholics are to regard Lent as a Penitential Season, as also are each and every Friday of the year a day of penance.}

And must there not result from this ever-growing spirit of immortification, a general effeminacy of character, which will lead, at last, to frightful social disorders? The sad predictions of Pope Benedict XIV are but too truly verified. Those nations, among whose people the spirit and practice of penance are extinct, are heaping against themselves the wrath of God, and provoking His justice to destroy them by one or other of these scourges - civil discord, or conquest. In our own country of Britain as also in France, there is an inconsistency, which must strike every thinking mind: the observance of the Lord's Day, on the one side; the national inobservance of days of penance and fasting, on the other. The first is admirable, and, if we except puritanical extravagances, bespeaks a deep-rooted sense of religion; - but the second is one of the worst presages for the future. The word of God is unmistakable; unless we do penance, we shall perish. [Saint Luke 13:3.] But if our ease-loving and sensual generation were to return, like the Ninivites, to the long-neglected way of penance and expiation, who knows but that the arm of God, which is already raised to strike us, may give us blessing and not chastisement?

Let us resume our history, and seek our edification in studying the fervor wherewith the Christians of former times used to observe Lent. We will first offer to our readers a few instances of the manner in which dispensations were given.

In the thirteenth century, the archbishop of Braga applied to the reigning Pontiff, Innocent III, asking him what compensation he ought to require of his people, who, in consequence of a dearth of the ordinary articles of food, had been necessitated to eat meat during the Lent. He at the same time consulted the Pontiff as to how he was to act in the case of the sick, who asked for a dispensation from abstinence. The answer given by Innocent, which was inserted in the Canon Law, [Decretals, book 3, chapter Concilium; de Jejunio, Heading title 46,] is, as we might expect, full of considerateness and charity; but we learn from this fact that such was then the respect for the law of Lent, that it was considered necessary to apply to the sovereign Pontiff when dispensations were sought for. We find many such instances in the history of the Church.

Wenceslaus II, king of Bohemia, being seized with a malady which rendered it dangerous to his health to take Lenten diet, applied, in the year 1297, to Pope Boniface VIII, for leave to eat meat. The Pontiff commissioned two Cistercian abbots to inquire into the real state of the prince's health; they were to grant the dispensation sought for, if they found it necessary, but on the following conditions: that the king had not bound himself by a vow, for life, to fast during Lent; that the Fridays, the Saturdays, and the vigil of Saint Mathias, were to be excluded from the dispensation; and, lastly, that the king was not to take his meal in presence of others, and was to observe moderation in what he took. [Raynaldi, Ad. ann. 1297.]

In the fourteenth century, we meet with two briefs of dispensation, granted by Clement VI, in 1351, to John, king of France, and to his queen consort. In the first, the Pope, taking into consideration that during the wars in which the king is engaged he frequently finds himself in places where fish can with difficulty be procured, grants to the confessor of the king the power of allowing, both to his Majesty and to his suite, the use of meat on days of abstinence, excepting, however, the whole of Lent, all Fridays of the year, and certain vigils; provided, moreover, that neither he, nor those who accompany him, are under a vow of perpetual abstinence. [D'Achery, Spicilegium, Volume 4.] In the second brief the same Pope, replying to the petition made him by the king for a dispensation from fasting, again commissions his Majesty's present and future confessors, to dispense both the king and his queen, after having consulted with their physicians. [D'Achery, Spicilegium, Volume 4.]

A few years later — that is, in 1376 — Pope Gregory XI sent a brief in favor of Charles V, king of France, and of Jane, his queen. In this brief, he delegates to their confessor the power of allowing them the use of eggs and milk-meats during Lent, should their physician think they stand in need of such dispensation; but he tells both physicians and confessor that he puts it upon their consciences, and that they will have to answer before God for their decision. The same permission is granted also to their servants and cooks, but only as far as it is needed for tasting the food to be served to their Majesties.

The fifteenth century, also, furnishes us with instances of applications to the Holy See for Lenten dispensations. We will cite the brief addressed by Sixtus IV, in 1483, to James III, king of Scotland, in which he grants him permission to eat meat on days of abstinence, provided his confessor considers the dispensation needed. [Raynaldi, Ad. ann. 1484.] In the following century, we have Julius II granting a like dispensation to John, king of Denmark, and to his queen Christina; [Raynaldi, Ad. ann. 1505] and, a few years later, Clement VII giving one to the emperor Charles V, [Raynaldi, Ad. ann. 1524] and again, to Henry II of Navarre, and to his queen Margaret. [Raynaldi, Ad. ann. 1533.]

Thus were princes themselves treated, three centuries ago, when they sought for a dispensation from the sacred law of Lent. What are we to think of the present indifference wherewith it is kept? What comparison can be made between the Christians of former times, who, deeply impressed with the fear of God's judgments and with the spirit of penance, cheerfully went through these forty days of mortification, and those of our own days, when love of pleasure and self-indulgence are for ever lessening man's horror for sin? Where there is little or no fear of having to penance ourselves for sin, there is so much the less restraint to keep us from committing it.

Where is now that simple and innocent joy at Easter, which our forefathers used to show, when, after their severe fast of Lent, they partook of substantial and savory food? The peace, which long and sharp mortification ever brings to the conscience, gave them the capability, not to say the right, of being light-hearted as they returned to the comforts of life, which they had denied themselves in order to spend forty days in penance, recollection, and retirement from the world. This leads us to mention some further details, which will assist the Catholic reader to understand what Lent was in the ages of faith.

It was a season during which, not only all amusements and theatrical entertainments were forbidden by the civil authority, [see the footnote,] but even the law courts were closed; and this in order to secure that peace and calm of heart, which is so indispensable for the soul's self-examination, and reconciliation with her offended Maker. [Footnote: It was the Emperor Justinian who passed this law, as we learn from Photius; Nomocanon, Volume 7, chapter 1].

As early as the year 380, Gratian and Theodosius enacted that judges should suspend all law-suits and proceedings, during the forty days preceding Easter. [Code of Theodosius, book 9, title 35, law 4.] The Theodosian Code contains several regulations of this nature; and we find Councils, held in the ninth century, urging the kings of that period to enforce the one we have mentioned, seeing that it had been sanctioned by the canons, and approved of by the fathers of the Church. [Labbe, Concil. Volumes 7 and 9.] These admirable Christian traditions have long since fallen into disuse in the countries of Europe; but they are still kept among the Turks and Moslems generally, who, during the days of their Ramadan, an imitation inspired by the Christians’ Lent, forbid all law proceedings. What a humiliation for us Christians!

Hunting, too, was for many ages considered as forbidden during Lent: the spirit of the holy season was too sacred to admit such exciting and noisy sport. Pope Saint Nicholas I, in the ninth century, forbade it the Bulgarians, who had been recently converted to the Christian faith. [Ad consultat. Bulgarorum, Labbe, Concil. Volume 8.] Even so late as the thirteenth century, we find Saint Raymond of Pennafort teaching that those who, during Lent, take part in the chase, if it be accompanied by certain circumstances which he specifies, cannot be excused from sin. [‘Summ. cas. Poenit., book 3, title 29, De laps. et disp. Number 1.] This prohibition has long since been a dead letter; but Saint Charles Borromeo, in one of his Synods, re-established it in his province of Milan.

But we cannot be surprised that hunting should be forbidden during Lent, when we remember that, in those Christian times, war itself, which is sometimes so necessary for the welfare of a nation, was suspended during this holy season. In the fourth century, we have the emperor Constantine the Great enacting that no military exercises should be allowed on Fridays and Sundays out of respect to our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered and rose again on these two days, as also in order not to disturb the peace and repose needed for the due celebration of such sublime mysteries. [Eusebius, Life of Constantine, book 4, chapter 18 and 19.]

The discipline of the Latin Church, in the ninth century, enforced everywhere the suspension of war during the whole of Lent, except in cases of necessity. [Labbe, Concil. Volume 7.] The instructions of Pope Saint Nicholas I. to the Bulgarians recommend the same observance; [Ad consultat. Bulgarorum, Labbe, Concil. Volume 8.] and we learn, from a letter of Saint Gregory VII To Desiderius, abbot of Monte Cassino, that it was kept up in the eleventh century. [Labbe, Concil. Volume 10.] We have an instance of its being practiced in our own country of England, in the twelfth century, when, as William of Malmesbury relates, the empress Matilda, Countess of Anjou, and daughter of King Henry I of England, was contesting the right of succession to the throne against Stephen of Blois, count of Boulogne. The two armies were in sight of each other; but an armistice was demanded and observed, for it was the Lent of 1143. [William Malmesbury, Historia novella, number 30.]

Our readers have heard, no doubt, of the admirable institution called 'God's truce,' whereby the Church in the eleventh century succeeded in preventing much bloodshed. This law, which forbade the carrying of arms from Wednesday evening till Monday morning throughout the year, was sanctioned by the authority of Popes and Councils, and enforced by all Christian princes. It was an extension of the Lenten discipline of the suspension of war. Our saintly English king Edward the Confessor carried its influence still further by passing a law (which was confirmed by his successor, William the Conqueror), that God's truce should be observed without cessation from the beginning of Advent to the octave of Easter; from the Ascension to the Whitsuntide octave; on all the Ember days; on the vigils of all feasts; and lastly, every week, from None on Wednesday till Monday morning, which had already been prescribed. [Labbe, Concil. Volume 9.]

In the Council of Clermont, held in 1095, Pope Urban II, after drawing up the regulations for the Crusades, used his authority in extending God's truce, as it was then observed during Lent. His decree, which was renewed in the Council held the following year at Rouen, was to this effect: that all war proceedings should be suspended from Ash Wednesday to the Monday after the octave of Pentecost, and on all vigils and feasts of the blessed Virgin and of the apostles, over and above what was already regulated for each week, that is, from Wednesday evening to Monday morning. [Orderic. Vital. Histor. Eccles., Book 9.]

Thus, did the world testify its respect for the holy observances of Lent, and borrow some of its wisest institutions from the seasons and feasts of the liturgical year. The influence of this forty days' penance was great, too, on each individual. It renewed man's energies, gave him fresh vigor in battling with his animal instincts, and, by the restraint it put upon sensuality, ennobled the soul. There was restraint everywhere; and the present discipline of the Church, which forbids the solemnization of marriage during Lent, reminds Christians of that holy continency, which, for many ages, was observed during the whole forty days as a precept, and of which the most sacred of the liturgical books, the missal, still retains the recommendation. [Missale Romanum, Roman Missal, Missa pro sponso et sponsa, Mass for husband and wife.]

It is with reluctance that we close our history of Lent, and leave untouched so many other interesting details. For instance, what treasures we could have laid open to our readers from the Lenten usages of the eastern Churches, which have retained so much of the primitive discipline! We cannot, however, resist devoting our last paragraphs to the following particulars.

We mentioned, in the preceding volume, that the Sunday we call Septuagesima, the third Sunday before Ash Wednesday, is called, by the Greeks, ‘Prophone', because the opening of Lent is proclaimed on that day. The Monday following it is counted as the first day of the next week, which is Apocreos, the name they give to the Sunday which closes that week, and which is our Sexagesima Sunday. The Greek Church begins abstinence from flesh-meat with this week. Then on the morrow, Monday, commences the week called Tyrophagos, which ends with the Sunday of that name, corresponding to our Quinquagesima. White-meats are allowed during that week. Finally, the morrow is the first day of the first week of Lent, and the fast begins with all its severity, on that Monday, whilst, in the Latin Church, it is deferred to the Wednesday, (Ash Wednesday).

During the whole of the Lent preceding Easter, milk-meats, eggs, and even fish, are forbidden. The only food permitted to be eaten with bread, is vegetables, honey, and, for those who live near the sea, shellfish. For many centuries, wine might not be taken, but it is now permitted, and on the Annunciation and Palm Sunday a dispensation is granted for eating fish.

Besides the ‘Lent’ preparatory to the feast of Easter, the Greeks keep three others in the year: that which is called 'of the apostles,' which lasts from the octave of Pentecost to the feast of Saints Peter and Paul; that 'of the Virgin Mary,' which begins on the first of August, and ends with the vigil of the Assumption; and lastly, the ‘Lent’ of preparation for Christmas, which consists of forty days. The fasting and abstinence of these three ‘Lents’ are not quite so severe as those observed during the great Lent. The other Christian nations of the east also observe several ‘Lents’, and more rigidly than the Greeks, but all these details would lead us too far. We therefore pass on to the mysteries which are included in this holy season.